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ABSTRACT

This conference proceedings compile papers presented at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) Conference on Early Childhood Education (ECE) for a Democratic Society. Following welcoming remarks, the academic papers included are: (1) "Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education: The Research Evidence" (Cathy Wylie); (2) "'If We Only Knew...Contextualising Maori Knowledge'" (Wally Penetito); (3) "Democratic Learning and Teaching Communities in Early Childhood: Can Assessment Play a Role?" (Margaret Carr, Bronwen Cowie, Robyn Gerrity, Carolyn Jones, Wendy Lee, and Lesley Pohio); and (4) "Back to the Future--Young Children Constructing and Reconstructing 'White' Australia" (Glenda MacNaughton). Following the academic papers are addresses by the Director of NZCER regarding the organization, the Minister of Education regarding the government role in early childhood education, and the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission regarding children's rights. The final section of the conference proceedings presents recommendations that emerged from five discussion groups related to several themes, including constructions of quality, cultural understanding, parent involvement, children's rights, transitions between ECE and school, teacher training, ECE funding, and research and policy development. (Some papers contain references.) (KB)



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# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
## FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Conference Proceedings

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OCTOBER 2001

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

# CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS OCTOBER 2001

**Compiled by Bev Webber and Linda Mitchell**

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Te Rūnanga o Aotearoa mō te Rangahau i te Mātauranga
Wellington
2001

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Note: *These papers have been published as presented. There has been no substantial editing, but where possible a standard style has been used.*

# WELCOME

## Introduction

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you to the NZCER Early Childhood Education for a Democratic Society conference. The flyer for the conference stated that an emerging influence in early childhood education policy and development and practice is a focus on the rights and perspective of the child.

Underlying this, of course, is an understanding of the importance of quality early childhood education—a view that many of you have held for a long time but one that has only more recently been more widely understood. Many of us have been drawn to education by the belief that we could indeed make a difference. As a young teacher, with a great passion for science I thought the place to make a difference was the secondary sector—that I would be able to share my passion for science with students who would be encouraged to value the world around them and maybe pursue a career in science. I did, I think make a difference to a few students, but after a couple of years teaching I attended teachers college—and I sought courses that would give me a greater understanding of what, at that time, was termed the reluctant learner. I wanted to know more about teaching for learning—and why not all students shared my interest of science and learning. Later as a teacher educator I learnt a great deal more about this area of education from my primary colleagues. Such as the importance of the interaction between teacher and students; in engaging students in thinking; in capturing their interest; and challenging their ideas—all within the context of worthwhile experiences.

Then as a science educator, deeply interested in curriculum, I clearly remember reading *Te Whāriki* for the first time and recognising that in the development of SiNZC we had captured much of what we thought was important in the teaching and learning science, but forgot to acknowledged something key—enjoyment.

> Through exploration, children learn useful and appropriate ways to find out what they want to know and begin to understand their own individual ways of learning and being creative. These experiences enhance, the child's sense of self-worth, identity, confidence, and enjoyment. (*Te Whāriki,* p. 82)

Of course, we thought learning should be about enjoyment, but it took the early childhood community to actually say this.

Then, as an educator, deeply interested in the research associated with curriculum and learning I found myself drawn more and more to the literature set within the primary and then the early childhood sector. So another 'ahah' moment for me was reading the findings of the Competent Children project—that you will hear more about today. The experiences of early childhood do matter, and it is important that all children have the opportunity for rich, meaningful, positive, and thought provoking interactions with adults—as it is these experiences that not only enhance the child's sense of self-worth,

identity, confidence, and enjoyment' but that are key to the development of their competencies.

So my educational journey has led me, rather later than many of you, to fully realise the significance of the early years. However, while these years are significant, it is what actually happens that counts. Research has been critical in helping identify what makes a difference in these years and today's conference is our own exploration of issues within early childhood education. We will hear from top researchers in the Australasian region who will be challenging us to think about the rights of all children and the importance of ensuring that children have the chance to be active in their interactions with their significant adults. The rights of children will also be addressed by Rosslyn Noonan, our Chief Human Rights Commissioner. And of course, the presence later of the Minster of Education will again acknowledge that it is the early childhood sector that plays a key role in our future as a democratic society.

It is certainly timely that we have this conference as it is a time of great optimism in the sector. We hope the day is informative and challenging—and that you do enjoy it!

Robyn Baker
Director
NZCER

# WHY QUALITY MATTERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

**Cathy Wylie**
*New Zealand Council for Educational Research*

## Introduction

It's almost ten years since I joined with Anne Meade and Anne Kerslake Henricks to map out a New Zealand longitudinal study of the role of early childhood education, home resources, and children's experiences in their development. The fieldwork for the study itself began in 1993, thanks to Ministry of Education funding, which has kept the study alive. As we were coming up for our third report, Margaret Carr said she was looking forward to the 'next episode in the continuing saga.' And there has been a growing sense of dramatic tension in the project, particularly around the early childhood education material.

For how long would we be able to detect associations between early childhood education and children's performance? Would its imprint be washed out by the strong tides of school experience? When Jean Thompson, our Competent Children project statistician e-mailed me the results of her analysis for the children at age 10, 5 years after they left early childhood education, I must admit to putting aside some urgent matters to look at the results—and to being excited by what I saw.

First, that the early childhood education imprint was still evident. Second, that aspects of quality featured prominently in that imprint. Third, the aspects of quality which featured were ones which were largely consistent with other more short-term studies, both in early childhood education and in the school years, indicating a pretty robust base for early childhood education policy and practice. There were also a few surprises, and some complications to unravel. My paper today covers these four aspects.

I'll start with a brief outline of the competencies we cover in the project, before moving on to discuss our findings in relation to early childhood education.

What do we mean by the term 'competency'? We used it to refer to combinations of knowledge, skill, and sometimes, disposition. The study explores ten different aspects of capability which have been linked with successful learning and with satisfying social and economic participation in a democratic society. They are: literacy, mathematics, logical problem-solving, fine motor skills, communication, perseverance, individual responsibility (self-management), social skills with peers, social skills with adults, and curiosity. These don't cover all the aspects one would like to see alive and well in citizens taking part in a democracy, and they do not necessarily guarantee the knowledge, understanding, long-term vision, or wisdom necessary to make the most of democracy. But these competencies are important in building towards that capacity.

In the Competent Children project, we have tried to include as much material as possible about children's experiences and, as they grow older, their perspectives on those experiences. This is largely because we wanted to get behind the 'usual suspects' of family resources, to end up with something more than 'so what'—the 'so what' of inequalities in opportunity and support that pose in fact some of the hardest issues for democratic societies, particularly for those which are more market-democratic than social-democratic.

Like most studies which include these resources, we find that family income and parental education levels are powerful—particularly at the extremes. In our society, lack of formal education is a real disadvantage. So is low family income, particularly if it is persistent. In the Competent Children project, we have used $30,000 as the cut-off point,

slightly above the eligibility for a community services card for a family of 2. Children from families with high family incomes—we used $60,000 as our cut-off point, are advantaged by comparison with others. There has been some recent work on the role of income inequality as well as differences in dollar terms—Susan Mayer, for example, found in her statistical modelling that growing income inequality in the U.S. appeared to account for some of the growth in gaps between the educational outcomes for poor children compared with others. There are some real issues for democracies in terms of the social and economic contexts into which children are born.

Once we take family income and parental education into account, we find that family type or stability do not play a part in children's competency levels—the 'risk factors' if you like are these two.

Income levels and parental education levels overlap to a large extent. Parental education is especially important for children's development. So when we analyse the associations between early childhood education and children's competencies, we include family income and maternal qualification to see whether these might account for any differences in children's performance, rather than the factor itself. For example, if most families using early childhood education before their child's first birthday are doing so to continue parents' careers, the resources of higher parental education or income might account for children's later higher scores, rather than their early childhood education experience. What we try to do in the analysis is to separate out the contribution of each factor—which is not a straightforward task, and which can only be done imperfectly in any social research. But we are not trying to reduce factors which have a bearing on children's competency levels to a level which is so abstract as to be meaningless.

## Early childhood education findings from Competent Children

We gathered material about children's early childhood education experience from three main sources. I'll briefly outline this material, and then look at what we found in terms of its relationship to children's competency levels.

- Parents gave us their child's early childhood education history—which services they had attended, and for how long, their own involvement in their child's first and current service, and their views of these two services.

*Parental views and involvement*

We have consistently found no associations between parental views and involvement in early childhood education with children's competency levels. This surprises some people. Yet it is not inconsistent with other quantitative research findings. I interpret this lack of association in several ways. First, it is difficult to get a full picture of the values and expectations that lie behind different patterns of involvement and satisfaction, particularly in a few questions. Second, these differences in values and expectations are likely to be important, and to also reflect differences in home and family experiences. Third, there is no reason why parental involvement per se should indicate greater parental interest in education, or greater parental support or advocacy for a child's interests. Parents may be involved because they need to feel valued, to make a contribution in the company of other adults, to have adult conversation, to make friends—or to try to keep the cost of the early

childhood education within their reach. So fourth, our questions about parental involvement were limited. They did not specifically cover the kind of engagement of parents in their children's learning through the sharing of information two-ways between home and early childhood education centre, or their inclusion in assessment, that have been some of the most exciting innovations of recent years. If we were repeating this study, it is this kind of parental engagement or inclusion, rather than the traditional involvement which we would focus on.

*Length of early childhood education*

We have found that children who had three years or more of early childhood education tend to have higher scores at age 10 for mathematics, communication (receptive and expressive language use), logical problem-solving, and reading age. There appear to be no negative effects, as some have feared, for starting early childhood education when children are younger than 12 months. These patterns remain after taking family income and maternal education levels into account.

- Centre co-ordinators gave us information related to 'structural' aspects of early childhood education, such as staff qualifications, group size, staff:child ratios, as well as fee levels, and the overall socio-economic mix of the children they served.

At age 5, we found that centre quality overall was related to staff qualifications and highest salary levels, as found in U.S. studies. However, we found little relationship between group size and centre quality, largely because we included different early childhood education services in our sample, and we found that each of these service types had different and often contradictory mixes of structural indicators of quality. [1]Kindergarten staff, for example, were all qualified, but this was not matched by their high group size and high staff:child ratios. We therefore analysed staff:child ratios separately for each service, and found that the interaction between staff and children was negatively affected as the staff:child ratio grew. But the other aspects of quality that we measured were not.

It is worth noting that this association between staff:child ratios and the quality of staff:child interactions was not evident when we looked at ratios in terms of the number of adults who were interacting with the children. Thus it was early childhood education *staff* who could use the lower ratios more effectively. Adult bodies, on their own, are not enough.

This need to analyse structural factors of early childhood education within each early childhood education type has made it difficult to follow the structural features of early childhood education through in our analysis—we would need a much bigger sample to do so. What we have been able to follow up however is the socio-economic profile of each early childhood education centre in the study. This has not been much of a focus in the overseas research. We included it because it has been a factor of some attention in

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[1] Another reason might be that the children in our study were near age 5. The NICHD longitudinal study following children from birth onwards has found that group size is more important for toddlers than for older children. (Vandell and Wolfe, 2000, p. 15).

sociological and economic studies of school effectiveness, using concepts of 'peer effects', related to ideas about the value of social capital. The socio-economic profile of early childhood education centres proves to be an important aspect of our Competent Children findings.

We find that children whose last early childhood education centre served mainly children who were from middle-class homes had higher scores on average at age 10, for literacy, mathematics, communication, logical problem-solving, social skills with adults, and perseverance. On most of these, they were scoring around 10 percentage points more than children who had attended early childhood education centres serving mainly children from low income homes. That is a large difference. But for mathematics and reading comprehension, the difference in scores was even higher, around 20 percentage points. These patterns remained after taking family income and maternal qualification into account. There are important implications here for the planning of early childhood education services, ensuring their affordability, and the need to compensate for some extent by providing additional resourcing and support for those services that serve children in predominantly low socio-economic areas, as the new early childhood education equity funding will do.

- Our final source of material about early childhood education for the children in the Competent Children project was our research team's observations of each centre, and children's use of the centre.

We observed each child in the study five times over the course of several hours, for a minute at a time, looking at aspects such as their level of play, ranging from parallel passive play, where children work alongside each other without engaging, to pretend play, where children script themselves into different roles and follow a sequence, showing awareness of symbols, social situations, and using more complex social skills, and interactions with staff and other children. We repeated this on 3 occasions over 3–4 weeks, giving us a total of 15 observations for each child. When we related this material to centre quality, we found that the higher the rating of the centre, the more likely children were to have discussions with staff that extended their language use, and to actively exploring the materials made available in the centre; conversely the lower the rating, the more likely they were to show aggression. However, there was no relationship between levels of play and quality ratings: we did not find more pretend play in centres which scored highly for quality.

Our ratings of each centre's quality was based on several hours of observations on three different occasions. We used the observations to rate 21 aspects of early childhood education quality, mainly in *process* terms. At first we used these to provide an overall rating, with four sub-scales. This was in line with most of the U.S. research, which, while it uses scales which have many items, usually uses only a single overall quality rating in its analyses of the relationship between quality and outcomes for children.

At age 5 we found positive associations between three of these sub-scales and children's competency levels. At age 6 only one of the sub-scales showed clear associations: staff:child interaction. At age 8 a similar pattern showed. We wondered if, like the early childhood education types, our sub-scales contained items that 'behaved' differently, and would therefore cancel each other out. We had also become increasingly

interested in knowing more about the ingredients of early childhood education quality, and wanting to unpack our sub-scales as well as the global rating. So we shifted to analyse each quality item separately. This further unpacking has given us a fuller picture of the aspects of early childhood education quality which endure, and which appear to be the ones which warrant most attention from practitioners and policymakers.

The competencies which show most association at age 10 with early childhood education quality are literacy, mathematics, and social skills with peers.

At age 10, the aspects of early childhood education quality which continued to be associated with children's scores were:

- ECE staff ask children open-ended questions *(lowest scores for children whose final ECE centre scored in the bottom quartile);*
- the ECE centre is 'print-saturated' *(lower scores for children whose final ECE centre scored in the bottom quartile – but for children from low income homes, a linear relationship. PAT reading comprehension scores rose from 32 percentage points for those whose final ECE centre was in the bottom quartile to 50 percentage points for those whose final ECE centre was in the top quartile);*
- Children can select their own activities from a variety of learning centres *(highest scores for children whose ECE centre scored above the median for Social Skills with Peers, Individual Responsibility, Social Skills with Adults);*
- ECE staff guide children through activities *(higher scores for children whose final ECE centre scored in the top quartile);*
- ECE staff join children in their play *(higher scores for children whose final ECE centre scored in the top quartile);*
- Children are allowed to complete their work *(highest scores for Mathematics for children whose final ECE centre scored in the top quartile);*
- Children co-operate and support one another *(highest scores for Literacy and Logical Problem-Solving in the middle band).*

What do these have in common? Taken as a whole, they indicate learning environments which provide plenty of opportunities for dialogue, for practical development of skills and the linking of the exercise of concentration with the reward of completion and enjoyment. You don't get a picture from this of highly structured, didactic teaching, but of teachers focusing on the interests of individual children, providing a flexible structure, which is hidden, through matching interest and activity, accompanying interests and activities with language which engages children's minds, and gets them using language to think things through as well as to show recognition.

Exposure to the written word is a large and important part of this—again, not in a didactic way, but in ways which take it for granted, which show print as an every day part of life that is useful and enjoyable. Children do not need to come to school already reading to learn to read or to make the most of school—but they do need to be familiar with print, with the idea of symbols, with the idea of relationships between what we say and what we can read. In the same way, children who attend good quality early childhood education pick up understandings and knowledge and simple practice related to pattern, number, size, relationships, and measurement in many early childhood education activities. These are informal experiences, but made available through early childhood

education teachers' knowledge of the sorts of activities which are productive for children, and the ways in which children are most likely to take readily to them, including the importance of responding to their existing interests. Responding to children rather than accommodating them or asking them to fit into a single mould also respects their culture.

As in so much of education, then, the quality of the teacher is key to the quality of the learning. Good quality teachers—with the understanding, the knowledge, the skills—are key to good quality early childhood education. Good quality early childhood education cannot be provided by rote. Initial training and then ongoing professional development is crucial.

Salary levels are also important, as we found in the first phase of the Competent Children project, and as U.S. research has also reiterated. Deborah Phillips and her colleagues in their recent study of childcare quality interpret the importance of salary levels, which make a contribution to quality over and beyond teacher qualifications, in terms of their role in encouraging stability of teachers, and therefore the opportunity for deeper relations with individual children. They also raise the question of whether centres which pay well can also be more selective than others, and more able to attract teachers who value good quality early childhood education (Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, and Abbott-Shim, 2000, pp. 490–491).

Good quality teachers also need the time to respond to and work with individual children: hence the importance of ensuring that teacher: child ratios and group size allow such quality attention. In their review of research on early childhood education quality, Love, Schochet and Meckstroth (1996, p.30) concluded that:

> By themselves, such [structural] variables as lower ratios, smaller group sizes, and safer physical equipment and space do not improve language development or enhance the cognitive complexity of children's play. Nevertheless, they may be extremely important as conditions that permit caregivers to be more responsive and to create developmentally appropriate experiences for the children.

Burchinal et al. (2000) found that early childhood education centres which scored highly on the ITERS scale (an American scale of 35 highly correlated items related to the quality of centres providing childcare for infants in terms of their environment, curriculum teacher-child interactions, and teaching practices) or the ECERS scale focused on quality at the preschool level also provided staff:child ratios which allowed meaningful dialogue between staff and children. Children attending these centres also had higher scores for language and cognitive development, after taking into account the quality of their home environment and poverty levels.

Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence (1999) remind us of the importance of seeing early childhood education in historical context, and not assuming that the standards and methods that work well in one society, or which are seen as good gauges of quality, will work equally well in all. Nonetheless, what they outline is the importance of ways of looking and responding, of opening up dialogue between teachers and children, respecting the children's 'strategies of learning and making meaning' (p. 148) while also finding ways to challenge them. Thus they suggest some common principles underlying work with children to enhance their understanding and learning, which will result in different

specific activities and approaches in different cultures. At the heart of this is the early childhood education teacher.

The quality of teacher:child interaction is a perennial theme in the research (e.g. Tarullo (2000). Tricia David and her colleagues cite an interesting study of children's writing activities showing the importance of such interaction. When Pickett provided more literacy materials in the block corner of an early childhood education centre, literacy activities rose four-fold. When an adult modelled the use of literacy materials, children's use increased by fifty times.

> Because children tend to incorporate their own experiences and knowledge into their play, it is not surprising that some of them with little experience and awareness of literacy in their lives may be unable to incorporate literacy spontaneously. (David et al., 2000, p. 39).

Linked to the now strong evidence about the importance of the quality of teacher:child interaction is the value of child-centred approaches compared with formal, didactic approaches. Love et. al, pp.17-18 summarise U.S. research studies which compared children's performance in different settings; a recent study of children's views in low and high quality settings suggested that:

> Classrooms that emphasise predominantly teacher-directed, large group activities that focus on rote memorisation may establish patterns that say school is disengaging and tedious. Children's recitations of their day as lists of activities to get through provide testimony to the repetitious and unfulfilling quality of some child care experiences. (Wiltz and Klein, 2001, p. 232.)

Joy Cullen in an article for the June 2001 issue of *Pitopito Korero* refers to literacy researchers' emphasis on the importance of interactive learning rather than ready-made lessons, relying on commercial resources. Tricia David and her colleagues refer to an international comparison showing that:

> The countries where children are taught to read early, using formal teacher-led, instructional approaches, are those where later achievement is lower than in countries which, through play, lay structured foundations in their nurseries. (David et al, 2000, referring to Brooks et al, 1997).

The U.S. research shows consistent relationships between early childhood education quality and children's cognitive performance, language use, and emotional well-being. Deborah Vandell, a noted child development researcher, and Barbara Wolfe, a noted economist have recently provided a particularly valuable review of the research in this area, with careful analyses of the few studies which have found no relationship between quality and outcomes for children which point to such problems as reliance on unreliable or insufficient data, or measures of outcomes or quality. They note that family resources and parental interaction usually have larger associations with children's performance and well-being than early childhood education on its own, but also note that early childhood education does have a significant association, and estimate some quite marked

improvements for children's language scores if the quality of their early childhood education was improved. Another important finding from the continuing and important NICHD Early Child Care Research Network study is that the quality of their early childhood education experience, both past and present, has stronger relationships with children's performance and well-being at age 3, than the hours they have spent at early childhood education.

We are still some distance from ensuring that every New Zealand child has access to good quality early childhood education. For example, only a few of the early childhood education centres in our study scored a 4 or 5 out of 5 for providing a print-saturated environment. 'Print-saturated' is a graphic way of describing ECE centres where the printed word was strongly in evidence. A centre which scored full marks for this item would have print visible on a variety of surfaces, such as posters, packets, charts, containers, and at a child's eye-level or just above. Much of the printed material would be child focused. There would be a range of books readily accessible to children, and children would be encouraged to listen to and read stories, look at books, and be aware of print in use.

Over a fifth of the centres in the study had poor scores for these key aspects of quality:

- staff ask open-ended questions;
- staff join children in their play.

In addition, it was the centres serving mainly middle-class children who tended to have higher scores on some of these key quality items. Children from disadvantaged homes, who arguably need even higher quality early childhood education, were missing out.[2] For example, 54 percent of the children attending centres serving mainly low income children were in centres which scored in the lowest quartile for staff asking open-ended questions, compared with 29 percent of the children attending centres serving mainly middle class children. Forty-four percent in the lowest quartile for a print-saturated environment, compared with 17 percent of children in centres serving mainly middle-class children.

Yet this is a key learning period. It's become a truism in education that the difficulties of each stage could be prevented by attention earlier on: but this is indeed particularly true and evident for early childhood education and the first few years of school. We find in the Competent Children project that the windows of opportunity for learning become much narrower after the age of 8. We also find that, like early childhood education, earlier habits and resources continue to have long-lasting effects: so low family income when a child is near 5 will continue to show itself in competency levels, even if the family income improves. Children who are used to watching television for a few hours each day by the time they finish early childhood education[3] will continue to spend their time less

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[2] At age 5, this was not so apparent, because we used a global quality rating in our analysis of whether family income made a difference to children's access to early childhood education quality. Unlike the ITERS or ECERS, the items in our quality rating, which reflect NZ early childhood education curriculum and concerns, were not highly correlated.

[3] Our data on children's television watching comes from parents. We do not know how much television children were also seeing in early childhood education centres—if we were repeating this study now we would certainly want to look at children's exposure to television in centres, including family day care.

profitably than children who have come to other habits and interests which require more of them, involve them more with others, and which allow more complex or symbolic uses of language. Children from families with low levels of parental qualification and income are more likely to turn to television for recreation—as are their parents. This is understandable: television is in the home, and it does not cost much in dollar terms. Yet children who watch more than two hours of television a day on a regular basis have lower scores than others.

## Implications for policy

Quality does matter; it is not enough to focus on improving access and participation rates if children are not able to have good quality. It would be good if all the indicators of quality pointed in the same direction, particularly staff:child ratios and fully trained staff who understand and are able to provide the attention and language that children need. To do so, they need support, professional development, and conditions which foster the best use of their time, including opportunities to assess children well, and to discuss and analyse their work with each other. Skilled, thoughtful teachers who are responsive to children, and have the time to work well with them seem to be the most important aspects of quality, and the ones which are most likely to provide enriching experiences for children, which continue to nurture them for years afterwards.

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# 'IF WE ONLY KNEW.... CONTEXTUALISING MAORI KNOWLEDGE'

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## Abstract

New Zealand teachers across all sectors are notoriously ill-informed about local Maori knowledge yet their early teacher socialisation tells them how important it is to begin where children are, and what they already are familiar with, so that they can build on that prior knowledge. Paraphrasing from Kirkness (1992, p. 34), teachers are reminded that:

> Unless children learn about the forces which shape them: the history of their people, their values and customs, their language, they will never really know themselves or their potential as human beings.

This presentation asks questions about the sorts of local knowledge that could be made available in learning institutions as well as the processes for establishing contexts meaningful for Maori. It is argued that when and only when these conditions are met will we see the sort of progress Maori children are capable of within mainstream education.

## Introduction

This is probably as good a time as any to return to some philosophical roots when trying to counter or clarify some of the naïve notions which abound in discussions about what needs to happen to improve Maori Education (ME) from the sad state that much of it is in at present. We are led to understand that in general terms:

- more Maori pre-schoolers need to be enrolled in early childhood education than are currently enrolled;
- there are too many kohanga reo (TKR) not operating as well as they could be;
- far too few kura kaupapa (KKM) are working effectively;
- the proportion of Maori students in the mainstream compulsory sector who are not attending schools on a consistent basis is virtually epidemic-like; and
- the number of Maori students leaving schools without any formal qualifications is scandalous.

The last two bullet-points (poor attendance, and academic underachievement) are, in my opinion, far in advance the most pressing problems facing Maori education at present. The solution to these two problems rests predominantly with what I have referred to as 'the mainstream'. Far too many of our schools and their teachers simply do not engage Maori children or more bluntly, do not teach Maori children. I do not want to play down the first three issues: Maori pre-school enrolments, and the mediocre or poor performance of some TKR and KKM but one would think that from the media and Education Review Office reports that these were the major problem areas in Maori education. Not so in my view. The longer Maori children remain in our schools the more bored and alienated many of them become; they do not accept a curriculum which too frequently is a denial of who they are; they soon become intolerant of rules in which they have little or no say and which they soon perceive as being rules for the sake of having rules; they have teachers who are narrowly focused on subject expertise and biased in favour of ethnocentric and

middle-class values; but most important of all they experience teachers on a daily basis who make it known by their (in)actions that they have only minimal tolerance for anything Maori . What really gets under the skin of Maori children and their parents, and their grandparents is the attitude that permeates the system which says that what belongs to Maori is of no use to Maori or anybody else in this global, high technology, and fast moving world as though Maori do not actually exist in the world. Many Maori young people are 'forced' to make a false choice; to be Maori, or to be in the real world.

## Contextualising Maori knowledge for New Zealand teachers

I will begin by unravelling three inter-related agenda items that we as New Zealand teachers need to know more about. The first is a theme which is taking on a more strident note on the lips of many Maori and is what I will refer to as the desire 'to be Maori'. The second is about the vexed question of the 'ownership of knowledge', while the third is about the nature of Maori knowledge versus the nature of knowledge that gets into the education system .

This is by way of setting the scene and will bring us to the nub of this presentation which is to answer the question:

What is the knowledge that teachers need in order for them to better:

a) understand the Maori child; and
b) participate in the Maori community?

Later I will try to answer this question by discussing five underlying assumptions about our education system that we should know about before we begin the task of implementing the production of local Maori knowledge into our learning institutions.

## Being Maori

In the last 20 years in particular, Maori have come out fighting to retain their language but in the next 20 years my guess is that 'matauranga' (knowledge) in its many manifestations, for example, 'mohiotanga' (skills), and maramatanga' (enlightenment) will become the touchstone for judgments about the progress being made in the field of Maori education and its contribution to mainstream education.

The New Zealand education system has always operated as though all its clients were either Pakeha or wanted to become Pakeha; Maori had much to learn from Pakeha but Pakeha had little to learn from Maori. The quote from Verna Kirkness in the abstract to this paper is profound but only because it is not realised in practice as far as Maori are concerned. *Unless children learn about the forces which shape them . . . they will never really know themselves or their potential as human beings.* 'If we only knew . . .' is an appeal to 'know' the Maori children we teach, as individuals, as members of whanau, as tangatawhenua, as manuwhiri, as members of hapu and iwi, as New Zealanders, as thinking and feeling human beings. Despite 200 years of colonialism the Maori population is numerically stronger than it has ever been. Some will want to argue that Maori identity is weaker because of inter-marriage, urbanisation, modernisation, industrialisation etc., Maori language loss and similar characteristics are the constant

effects of colonialism. If by that they mean it is no longer like it was prior to Europeanisation then they are obviously correct. But one of the reasons Maori have survived culturally is because they have been able to adapt to changes (sometimes through choice and sometimes through coercion) and as a result are stronger today than they have ever been. But they have paid a price.

The lesson we need to learn is an equally obvious one and that is 'there are many ways *to be* Maori' and there is no such thing as 'the' Maori identity, there are only Maori identities.

## The moral dilemma of ownership of knowledge

The answers to the question about what knowledge teachers need if they are going to make a difference to Maori students raises a moral dilemma. In order to acquire this knowledge, that is, to learn it, the knowledge must become things that teachers possess but at the same time they need not be essential to the being that they are. For example, as an infant or primer, as they were called when I was at primary school, I learned to recite rhymes like 'Hickory dickory dock', to sing songs like 'Frere Jacques', and to read and relate to historical stories like 'Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn' but at no stage was I ever convinced I was European because even though these were knowledges that I possessed they were not essential ingredients to my being as a Maori. The acquisition of Maori knowledge poses no threat to a teacher's identity but the mere fact that the teacher has it can make a world of difference to a Maori child.

On the occasions when we did learn Maori knowledge we behaved as children do, that is, we accepted what the teachers told us and even defended our teachers against our parents who often criticised what the teachers had told us. Our parents said things like, 'You don't pronounce his name T'Cootee it's Te Kooti; and he wasn't a rebel either, he stood up for his people against land sharks who were ripping off our people.' We would reply, 'What do you know about history any way, you hardly even went to school and the only book you can read is the Best Bets. Our teachers know about Maori better than you do.'

Sentiments like these have echoed around the corridors of schools and the kitchens of homes for generations. Most teachers still do this grave injustice to Maori knowledge and Maori parents still argue with their children about their teachers without either party doing anything constructive about rectifying the problem. I too have been one of those parents and a variant form of one of those teachers: I taught the generic Maori topics like, 'How the Maori came to Aotearoa' and 'How the Maori lived before the white man came' but never really made it personal, and never really attached it to people living today. It was an outdated museum study. The third element of a context for building a Maori knowledge platform for teachers focuses more specifically on the sort of knowledge that might become part of the curriculum.

## Particularism versus universalism

In Maori terms knowledge is particularistic whereas school knowledge, traditionally, is perceived as being universalistic. This has the potential to pose another dilemma for education, namely, what knowledge should be made available for teaching and evaluating

in the classroom? What knowledge should teachers have of their pupils in order to be able to empathise and help them learn more effectively? I think that the Maori knowledge that gets into the learning institutions should be a selection from local whanau/hapu/iwi sources. This follows the same argument that Denis Lawton (1983) makes with regard to his definition of the curriculum for schools. His definition of curriculum is 'a selection from the cultures' that are served by the learning institutions. Not all local knowledge is appropriate in institutionalised settings and nor would these local sources want all their knowledge to be made available publicly if that was possible which of course it is not.

My argument is that local whanau/hapu/iwi must decide what should be available and how it should be made accessible. In traditional Maori terms knowledge has a spiritual dimension in that it is handed down from one generation to the next and is often referred to as *nga taongo tuku iho* (the treasures handed down). Knowledge is always perceived in relational terms rather than as something fixed in time and space, *tuia i runga, tuia i raro, tuia i roto, tuia i waho, tuia te here tangata, ka rongo te po, ka rongo te ao* (combined across all space and time). Knowledge is specific to place, *Mokau ki runga, Tamaki ki raro* (the region designated by Mokau above and Tamaki below) . Knowledge is tied to one's identity through language, *ko te reo te mauri o te mana Maori* (my language is the foundation of my being as a Maori). Maori knowledge serves all these purposes and much more. It is contemporary as well as being traditional; it is secular as well as being sacred; it is theoretical as well as being practical; it is both idealist and materialist, otherwise, how could we talk about Maori being and existing in the world if the only knowledge we valued was traditional, ngaa taaonga tuku iho? Pakeha do not have a monopoly on 'universalistic' knowledge. Almost 200 years of colonialism cannot deny the liberating effects that European universalising knowledge has had on countless Maori people. But as stated earlier, there has been a price. With particularism comes community, solidarity, connectedness and meaning which is the counter or up-side of what Berger (1979, p. 169) refers to as 'the rootlessness of modernity'.

The penultimate section of this presentation attempts to draw together five assumptions which might be helpful in guiding teachers in their participation with Maori students and communities.

## Underlying assumptions for teacher acquisition of Maori knowledge

### If only we knew . . .

that knowing a child *culturally* is not the same as knowing a child *psychologically:*

- Teacher training and the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship are geared toward psychological understandings. Is the child's behaviour accepting of the role of teacher as the authority figure, as the one who knows? Does the teacher recognise the child's readiness to learn?
- Knowing a child culturally is generally, not taken seriously enough because the content of the curriculum and the role of the teacher are considered culturally neutral and it is doubtful that they ever are.
- Unless teachers can process psychological as well as cultural understandings in the learner/teacher complex some children will be likely disadvantaged by the

exchange. For some of the reasons already explained many of these children will be Maori.

## If only we knew . . .

that the tradition of education in New Zealand is that Maori have to learn *'Pakeha-ways'* without there being any necessary reciprocation on the part of Pakeha, that is Pakeha have not had to learn anything substantial about *'Maori-ways'*.

- Read the national newspapers almost every day of the week and note how the practical, down-to-earth, fair-minded public of New Zealand talk about 'Maori-ways'. Any affirmation of 'Maori-ways' is seen as 'the absurdity of ramming things Maori down one's throat' to quote Bob Jones' recent epistle to 'Punchlines' in The Dominion (13 October, 2001) — the feature would be more appropriately labelled 'Punchdrunk' given the woozie nature of some of Jones' writings on Maori topics.
- 3 or 4 years ago Richard Manning wrote a thesis entitled 'Dial a Powhiri' which in part, at least was a critique of the way some schools appropriated legitimate Maori grievances to their own advantages. On Tuesday night this week (22 October) a 'soap' on TV 1, *'Spin Doctors'* put Manning's thesis in practice again by their parody on the powhiri. The integrity and mana of Maori knowledge is abstracted from any meaningful context, distorted to fit a manufactured story-line and trivialised. I have said it before and I say it again, in the New Zealand curriculum, Maori knowledge has been emptied of intellectual coherency and moral force. I could be accused of being touchy and overly-sensitive except such bland treatment of Maori knowledge is the norm rather than the exception.

## If only we knew . . .

that by paying attention to Maori '*local knowledge*' through some kind of *participatory learning* would help redefine the relationship between whaanau/hapuu/iwi and learning institutions. This is certainly not a new idea and even though popular among development organisations (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) we are warned that participatory learning can still retain something of a manipulative agenda unless specifically and consciously countered at the outset.

- Over the last two or three years I have been concerned by the way in which the Ministry of Education (MoE) has negotiated with specific iwi in assisting them to prepare their own iwi education plans. First they have been piecemeal. What else in education with similar potential, is conducted with this much caution? One of the more recent of these arrangements is the Memorandum of Understanding between the MoE and Tuwharetoa. Earlier ones include negotiated relationships between the MoE and Tuhoe, Ngati Porou and Te Reo o Te Tai Tokerau while many more iwi throughout the country are queueing to follow suit. I am concerned that a government department is determining the pace by which iwi can get involved in the preparation of their own iwi educational plans. Most cannot do this work on their own bat because they have neither the resources nor the capability but they

could certainly learn from each other if the MoE merely facilitated the preparation of iwi education plans by providing the resources.

- Am I being paranoid again? And if I am is there justification? In 1997-98 I managed a national joint project for the MoE and Te Puni Kokiri (TPK) which was charged with the responsibility of consulting with Maori groups throughout New Zealand on what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses in Maori education at the local level and what they wanted to see as the future direction for Maori education. I, along with MoE and TPK officials attended 26 hui from Invercargill to Kaitaia. Apart from a note-taker I was the only person who attended the 26 hui. Who do you think was the most informed person to comment on the content of the consultations? With the MoE now facilitating hui with iwi groups across the country, who do you think will be the most informed about this negotiation process? The MoE of course. But is that a problem? Well yes if we know anything about the history of Maori education, and if we know anything about race relations, and colonialism, and cultural imperialism, and the Treaty of Waitangi. Power relationships between the Crown and Whanau/Hapu/Iwi are asymmetrical with the major influences heavily in favour of the Crown and its agencies. If members of the Ministry of Education begin to feel as though they are being unfairly picked on in this regard I suggest they refrain from complaining. They are, as the saying goes, big and powerful enough to look after themselves.

## If we only knew . . .

that the *production of Maori knowledge* at the local level, that is, through the work of *whanau/hapu/iwi* in collaboration with *professional researchers* where necessary, so as to document their own 'stories' has been an option that is only now beginning to be exploited albeit by 'insider' researchers (Simon (Ed.), 1998; Jenkins and Morris Matthews, 1995; Simon and Smith, 2001). By 'insiders' I mean, researchers who already have a predisposition toward the importance of whaanau/hapuu/iwi and their contributions to Maori education but who are also educationalists.

- Much local Maori knowledge has been lost for ever but much still remains. It resides in kaumatua and their memories and in their practices; some of it can be located in libraries and in archives, in the work of local historical societies, in Maori Land Court Records, in Parliamentary Papers, in School Logs, in broadcasting tape libraries, and in family histories.
- The location and documentation of old files will likely need the assistance of historical researchers with the sort of expertise they bring to the tasks of historiography. To some these 'stories' are simply myths but I think Carroll (1990, p. 90) has a helpful suggestion for us when he contended 'mythology is the history we do not believe, history is the mythology we do believe'.
- Most important of all is that this 'knowledge' needs to be dis-covered, un-covered, and re-covered in a process where whanau/hapu/iwi have and retain control over the whole process. They decide what they want to know, who should do the searching, how the search will be conducted, what will be distributed and what will not, and who will have access to it. They are the owners of this local knowledge in

terms of intellectual property and it is they who should decide the private-public differentiation of it.

- Methodologies for this type of research, discussed in a book by Charles Royal (1992) and more recently in a study by Monty Soutar (1996), are useful guidelines for the initial stages of documentation and selection. Once negotiations shift to learning institutions having access to the local knowledge different research/negotiation strategies are called for. The work of Russell Bishop (1996) on 'whakawhanaungatanga' is a very useful beginning for teachers and community people to guide their practices.
- In a paper written for a Maori research conference at Massey University (Penetito, 1998) I set out what I thought was a strategic process for getting Maori across the country involved in their own whanau/hapu/iwi knowledge production and education planning. My recommendation is, in general terms, similar to that of the MoE in its activities with individual iwi. The difference is that I suggest Maori have control over the process, that they systematically learn from each other what to do and what to avoid, and I leave the MoE out of the picture altogether since their mandate is to work with schools and teachers and only minimally with communities which has been their practice for a hundred years.

## If we only knew . . .

the sorts of *Maori knowledge* that *educationalists* would find most helpful in coming to understand Maori students. As a Maori educationalist of some experience I could reflect on the questions teachers have asked me about Maori knowledge. I could think about the things I have done with teachers over the years which they may have enthused over. I could remind myself of things I have seen and heard which I wish teachers had asked me about beforehand but didn't. If one thinks about current curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, management and governance, to name but a few of the key components that make up the educational enterprise, it soon becomes obvious that one cannot do justice to local Maori knowledge by steering a piecemeal intervention course. This fifth assumption then asserts the wisdom of a planned approach to knowledge production.

- We are reminded by Apple and Franklin (1979, p. 178) that the knowledge that got into schools in the past and gets into schools now is not random. It is, as has already been mentioned, selected and organised around sets of principles and values that come from somewhere, that represent particular views of morality and deviance, of good and bad, and of what 'good people act like'. Local Maori knowledge, just like Pakeha universal knowledge is constructed; it reflects local Maori powerful groups. This makes on-the-ground negotiations with communities over what will be legitimate knowledge absolutely critical.
- There is no one fixed idea of what Maori local knowledge is. There is really no such thing, traditionally as 'Maori' knowledge. There is only whanau/hapu/iwi knowledge. However, in today's world, the generic knowledge made universal, such as 'the Maori migration to Aotearoa' and 'Maori were cannibals before the arrival of Christianity' is perceived as being legitimate 'Maori' knowledge (not

tribal knowledge). Neither of these items of Maori knowledge originate from Maori sources nor do they originate from WHI sources yet they are still treated on the whole, as legitimate Maori knowledge.

## The status of Maori knowledge in education

Maori knowledge already exists in a variety of forms within mainstream education and it could be argued, that has always been the case. It can also be argued that Maori knowledge has always been 'managed' in the sense of being selected, interpreted, translated, co-opted and distributed by those who have the power to make these decisions; they have rarely if ever actually been Maori themselves. The outcome has been a 'watering-down' of Maori knowledge in the system. Foucault (in Tomlinson, 1997, p. 9) calls these practices 'procedures of rarefaction'. Rarefaction has the general meaning of 'becoming less dense' thus of 'refinement' or 'purification', but also of 'thinning out' of the dense mass of what is said about a subject. Charles Royal refers to this phenomenon as 'te kai mangai a nga tupuna', knowledge that is like chewed up food that is passed from one to another.

## An 'exploration of possibilities' for Maori educational futures

1. Maori have a tacit agreement among themselves as to the *social goal* they want for this society: It can be stated simply as the need for a sense of community, of connectedness, of solidarity, of mutuality, and of meaning. This must be achieved on the ground, at the level of whanau, hapu and iwi before it can have substance at the level of society.

2. Maori know that the effects of 19th century political colonialism, land losses throughout the early settler period, and the civilising mission of the education system for more than a hundred years separated them from much of their philosophical roots and cultural heritage. It is by seeking that which was lost, paradoxically, that Maori will grow, prosper and survive, expressed in Maori as 'rapua te mea ngaro, kia tupu, kia hua, kia puawai.'

3. Maori have prioritised their language survival as the single most important determinent which will be evidence of their continuation into the future as Maori. A holistic approach to education will require that questions about 'what counts as knowledge' (matauranga), 'what counts as pedagogy' (whakakoranga), and 'what it mean to be Maori' (mana Maori) are the key components of an educational praxis as well as being the primary purpose of the process of knowledge construction.

4. The acquisition of a Maori knowledge base, in the medium of the Maori language, through a process which uses Maori proven pedagogies is at the heart of Maori education. Bookchin (in Harvey, 1996, p. 56) describes this process as 'the exploration of possibilities' rather than the process of 'spinning out the implications of known truths', or 'discovering the general laws regulating what already exists'. The 'exploration of possibilities' is a different kind of education from that which prescribes, privileges, protects, excludes, and reproduces the

existing society from one generation to the next. Maori knowledge at the local level of whanau, hapu, and iwi is rarely available in a form which can be made available to a public audience. In most cases whanau/hapu/iwi will need the assistance of researchers to document local knowledge as well as the guidance of professional educators to transform the knowledge into school curriculum. Of course, those same researchers and teachers might actually originate from those communities but they need not.

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# DEMOCRATIC LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMUNITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: CAN ASSESSMENT PLAY A ROLE?

**Margaret Carr, Bronwen Cowie, Robyn Gerrity, Carolyn Jones, Wendy Lee and Lesley Pohio**

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For some time, many of us in early childhood have been puzzling about what is formative about formative assessment in an early childhood centre. This paper develops some ideas on this topic, drawing on stories from the field[4]. We are beginning to explore the view that *assessments can be formative of democratic communities of learning and teaching*. They can form and transform democratic communities of learners and teachers in three ways.

- Assessments can act as a 'conscription' or recruitment device for children, families, and the staff team, to participate in a social community of learners and teachers;
- Assessments can provide social spaces for everyone to contribute to the curriculum;
- Assessments can assist participants in the community to develop trajectories of learning—to story and re-story.

We could summarise these by saying that assessments can provide avenues for *conscription*, *contribution*, and *continuity*. This paper represents work in progress around this viewpoint, calling on examples of assessments in early childhood. The examples come (primarily) from two settings in which the staff are using 'learning stories' as an assessment tool: a particular form of documented and structured observations that take a storied and a non-deficit (credit) approach, and an underlying agenda of protecting and developing children's identities as learners in accordance with the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 2001; Ministry of Education, 1996). However, the argument in this paper holds for any narrative and credit-based assessment format.

It might be wise to include some definitions of assessment here. This definition comes from the work on early years' assessment in the UK by Mary Jane Drummond. Assessment is:

> The ways in which, in our everyday practice, we observe children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put our understandings to good use. (Drummond, 1993, p. 13)

Philippe Perrenoud writes that 'any assessment that helps the pupil to learn and develop is formative', and he adds:

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[4] This year, the authors have been working together on the Early Childhood Learning and Assessment (Exemplar) Project, funded by the Ministry as a pilot project with the national school curriculum exemplar project. School teams are developing exemplars of formative assessment linked to their various curriculum documents, and we are doing the same. Co-authors of this paper are the co-directors and the research assistant of the Project, the Head Teacher and Supervisor of the two illustrative early childhood settings, and an advisor on assessment issues. Other contributors must be acknowledged as well: the children and the families who have given permission for us to tell their stories, and the Ministry of Education with special thanks to Doreen Launder and Mary Chamberlain. Two of the authors are currently writing a paper that tackles in more detail some of the questions about formative assessment in early childhood raised in this paper (Carr and Cowie, in preparation).

> Development and learning depends on countless factors that are often interrelated. Any assessment that helps to optimise one or more of these factors, to however small a degree, can be considered formative. (1991, pp. 80–81)

He includes student motivation, social identity as a learner, views about learning, and classroom atmosphere as some of these 'countless factors'. One of the authors of this paper (Bronwen Cowie), in her work on assessment in science classrooms, has summarised the formative assessment process as 'noticing, recognising, and responding'. There is no contention that this responsive and reciprocal process plays a vital role in children's learning. And discussions and negotiations about the meaning of learning episodes with families and children will contribute to an inclusive learning community. What is more contentious is the value of documenting part of this process. We argue here, using learning stories as an example, that documentation can play a role in developing democratic learning and teaching communities that make a difference for children.

- *Conscription*

  Assessments can act as a 'conscription device' (Roth, 1994) for children, families, and the staff team, to participate in a social community of learners and teachers.

  Narrative and credit modes of assessment are particularly effective conscription devices because they: (i) provide a means of access for families to the practice and the purposes of the setting; (ii) they have an emotional appeal: affirming for families, children *and* teachers; (iii) they crystallise some of the dialogue about learning into formats that represent as well as document something valuable about the community's practice. (In Etienne Wenger's words, they 'reify' the practice, translating it into an artifact or a resource). The documentation and formats anchor the practice, and these formats include the opportunity for parent and child voices.

  There are a number of learning stories about Zach's learning in his portfolio at his childcare centre, and he and his family read them with interest. Many of them are about his interactive play with other children, his interest in music, and his counting skills. His family have appreciated knowing how he is getting on. They are invited to occasionally add a comment, and they do so. When Zach temporarily decides he doesn't want to go to childcare, his mother comments:

  > Because we had developed such a good relationship with the staff at crêche through sharing the positive learning stories, when there was a 'problem' it was no big deal. We could talk easily about how to handle the situation because there was an atmosphere of trust and respect on both sides.

  A parent comes into another centre and looks at the documentation on the wall. She says to the teacher: 'I didn't know my kid could do that'. Wendy Lee has a photo of a four-year-old avidly reading her folder at kindergarten.

  In Wolff-Michael Roth's terms, the assessments have provided 'social glue' for the community. In Philippe Perrenoud's terms, the assessments have contributed to the 'atmosphere' of this place, one that was trustworthy and respectful of all the participants.

- *Contribution*

  Assessments provide social spaces for everyone to contribute to the programme.

  This will only happen if the curriculum is 'permeable': porous, open to contribution from all comers. Te Whāriki doesn't set out detailed criteria for assessment that are external, explicit, predetermined and generalised. We think that is one of its strengths. In a recent address to a TRCC (Teacher Refresher Course Committee) course on assessment in early childhood, Linda Mitchell gave an example of the permeability of Te Whāriki. She described how two of the early childhood teachers in her network described their philosophy as 'Whanau, tamariki, kaiako. Working together . . .' (Mitchell, 2001). She also described that community working together to make a concrete wall at the early childhood centre. Barbara Comber (2000, p. 47) argues that a 'permeable' curriculum means that teachers learn about and work with families' "funds of knowledge", an idea introduced to early childhood discussion by Luis Moll (1992). It also allows the *children* to determine their own criteria for well-being, belonging, and so on. It provides a social space for:

  > . . . all the situations in which learners are developing their sense of what counts as 'good work' for themselves—where it is some inner sense of satisfaction which is the touchstone of 'quality'; where the sense of 'quality' is an holistic matter of taste, 'nose' or intuition . . . (Claxton, 1995, p. 340)

  Assessments can illustrate this process of everyone contributing to the curriculum, signal to families and children that this curriculum is indeed permeable, and provide cues for their involvement. In one early childhood centre, a Nanny provided a story for the children about a day's fishing in the weekend; it encouraged fishing discussions and play, and the teacher asked permission to write it down for her mokopuna's portfolio.

  We also see this working when we look at the portfolios of Tane, Sarah and Leon in a kindergarten in Auckland. Tane has just gone to school, and the following takes a 'core sample' from just one activity of the many in his portfolio, supplemented by assessments and photographs in the portfolios of two of his friends over the year that he attends the kindergarten.

  1. Tane's grandmother teaches him, at home, how to sew a bag and an apron. (Parent story and photograph: 'Tane has had an on-going enthusiasm for sewing projects following a session at kindy where he used a needle and thread for the first time. With his MumMum he made a bag with button decorations and pictured above is the apron he made last week. . . . The biggest challenge was coming to grips with having to finish each seam with some kind of knot to keep it all together').

  2. Tane adds to this story, and tells the teacher he would like to make an apron and a bag at kindergarten. She reminds him that he will need a pattern. He involves Sarah and another friend. (Learning Story 22/06/01)

3. Tane says 'he was going to teach Sarah how to make an apron and he was going to make a bag'. He draws the pattern (Learning Story 22/06/01; drawing attached). Sarah and Viliami watch attentively while he cuts the fabric (photograph); Tane and Sarah discuss their ideas about the type of fabric (photograph).

4. Sarah decides to make a 'board with material on it' (Sarah's Learning Story 22/06/01). With assistance from the teacher, she makes a sign for the board: 'No shoes allowed in my room' (photograph).

5. Earlier Tane has made a dragon as part of an emergent project of dragons that developed when staff played a video taken at the Lantern festival in Albert Park celebrating the end of the Chinese New Year. 'The initial project centred on a collaborative plan to make a large dragon and then developed into individual children making their own individual dragons' (Learning Process Story, 24/5/01; Child's Voice 16/5/01; Parent's Voice June 01: 'Tane's first experience of a Chinese dragon was in London. Our accommodation celebrated the Chinese New Year with a dragon dance. . . .Tane attended the dance and has continued to be fascinated by dragons (and drumming)'. (Another photograph in his portfolio shows him drumming while another child dances).

6. Tane decides to sew a dragon costume (Learning Story 22/06/01). He has trouble with the mask, makes a pirate hat instead so his dragon costume became a pirate costume (photograph).

7. Tane sews a motorcycle helmet (with adult support) on the sewing machine (photographs).

8. Sarah sews an arm band and a hat out of the same lacy fabric that Tane made a motor cycle hat (Learning Story 16/07/01).

9. On the first day back in Term 4, Leon and Tane decide to sew; Leon has drawn a pattern of a boat: later turns his construction into a fabric frame for his drawing. He also sews a head band (photograph).

10. On a number of occasions earlier Tane and Leon had played as ambulance/rescue workers (photographs and story, 14/11/00).

11. Tane and Leon and Sarah decide to make ambulance jackets. Tane draws an initial pattern and with the teacher they discuss how to develop a pattern from the centre's jackets. (Learning Story 18/8/01; photographs)

12. They decide that 'ambulance trousers' would look good, but 'we haven't got a pattern for that'. The teacher knows that Sarah's mother sews, and suggests that Sarah's Mum might have one. Sarah's mother provides a pattern. Trousers are made.

13. The three children decide to make bags, and this bag making 'triggered interest from many others and so the bag factory began' (Learning Story 21/08/01)

This very small sample of the documented assessments for three children in one early childhood setting illustrates the weaving together of three voices—teachers, children, and families—as participants in a learning and teaching community. It includes all three groups as teachers. (Diagram of weaving of the three participants together to construct the curriculum). By the time these three voices are woven together, they cannot be disentangled. They form the curriculum, the practice, and the learning.

- *Continuity*

  Assessments assist participants in the community to develop trajectories of learning – to story and re-story.

  This is the more traditional purpose of formative assessments: mutual feedback and dialogue about 'What next?', about trajectories of learning, or learning as 'work in progress'. Assessments provide teachers with the information they need to plan for further learning, and enable them to notice, recognise and respond to learning episodes. The literature refers to working in the zone of proximal development; Allan and Carmen Luke (2001, p. 95) remind us of the evidence of different life pathways, different forms of identity and diverse skills. The nature of the zone is uncertain. So, much of this feedback is guesswork, informal, and 'on the hoof', but it will be informed by the earlier documentation. It calls on our intuitions as teachers, on Elliot Eisner's notion that teaching is an art rather than a science. It invites teachers to listen to the children's and the families' voices, and to change their minds. Etienne Wenger comments that in a community of practice we situate ambiguity in the context of a history of mutual engagement that is rich enough to yield an opportunity for negotiation (1998, p. 84)

  Assessments can provide that history of mutual engagement and transformation of participation. Continuity is negotiated both by discussions and by documentation. Both have the capacity for storying and re-storying, and for reminding us not to "attempt to create cohesion at the expense of complexity" (Ann Knupfer, 1996, p. 142). Wenger (p. 231), on 'learning architectures', has this to say:

> I have argued that participation and reification are dimensions of both practice and identity. As such, they are two avenues for influencing the future—whether the direction of a practice or the trajectory of a person. In this sense, participation and reification are two complementary aspects of design that create two kinds of affordance for negotiating meaning:
>
> 1. One can make sure that some artifacts are in place – tools, plans, procedures, schedules, curriculums—so that the future will have to be organised around them.
> 2. One can also make sure that the right people are at the right place in the right kind of relation to make something happen.

Both these dimensions must fit together. Philippe Perrenoud adds, for instance that:

> It would be absurd to proceed with formative assessment without first calling into question the teaching method and without seeking, as a priority, to make the teaching situations more interactive and richer in spontaneous feedback (1991, p. 84).

The development of our identities as learners involves a 'layering' of documentation and participation (Wenger, p. 193).

When Tane and Sarah set the table for morning tea, Sarah wants to add a vase of flowers; Tane suggests that he draw a flower picture for the table. Lesley (the teacher) had written learning stories about the children growing and drawing sunflowers, and about children laminating pictures. She suggests that Tane laminate his picture as a mat for the table: he takes up this suggestion with enthusiasm, laminating one for Sarah and one for himself. Some days later Sarah will draw and laminate her own. The assessments kept a record of this story's six month pathway: storying and re-storying as it changed direction and focus.

Tane and Sarah and Leon have been developing a number of skills and adding to their funds of knowledge. For instance: they have been translating a pattern into a garment with a considerable input of measurement, embedded in the task; they are differentiating between the quality of different fabrics for different purposes, they have learned skills with technology like sewing machines and irons, and they have demonstrated an appreciation of the value of written text. They are *also* developing identities as learners, and the two processes are closely connected. Their repertoires of participation in a learning community include: following an interest; negotiating social space in which to get on with the job; coping with challenge; teaching a peer; helping each other, listening to and respecting the opinions and suggestions of others (including adults); taking responsibility for their own curriculum (and for others'). Barbara Comber (2000) and Etienne Wenger are writers who argue strongly for the value of the latter: identity is 'the vehicle that carries our experiences from context to context' says Wenger (1998 p.268). Comber describes the successful transition to school literacy of two four-year-olds and comments on their 'willingness to display their knowledge and to elicit help' which meant that they often received the feedback and advice they needed at exactly the right time. In the case of Tane Sarah and Leon, mutual dialogue and feedback, some of which has been documented and shared, has assisted with this learning.

Here is two-year-old Zahra, in Robyn Gerrity's early childhood centre for refugee children and their families. Families spend six weeks in the centre before they are resettled somewhere else. Robyn writes learning stories about the children, and they are translated for the families.

1. Zahra spots the rocking horse, clearly feels at home rocking on it at the beginning of each day. (This story is translated for the family)

2. Mother reports that Zahra asks each evening if the 'donkey' at the centre is warm, asleep (Parent's voice)

3. Brother explains that there were many donkeys at the refugee camp

4. Grandmother spends considerable time at the centre, explains that the family has been donkey traders for two generations. (Grandmother's voice)

5. Robyn finds songs, stories and pictures about donkeys for Zahra.

Robyn has learned that donkeys are of great significance to Zahra. She has found something to talk knowledgably about in English with both Zahra and her family, an entry point for the curriculum. Zahra's story, and its re-storying, goes with her to her next early childhood centre. It is a story of formative assessment and belonging.

A democratic community might be seen as a characteristic of a place where people are able to (and recognise that they are able to): belong, make an authentic and valued contribution, and collectively make a difference for children. We suggest that assessments can help to construct just such a democratic community, one in which children and families and staff are willing and valued learners and teachers.

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# 'BACK TO THE FUTURE — YOUNG CHILDREN CONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING "WHITE" AUSTRALIA'

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## Abstract

Our future is inextricably linked with our past. In post-colonial countries such as Australia our colonial history has produced 'racial' knowledge, desires, experiences and ideologies that constantly touch and tear at the possibilities of 'White' Australia living respectfully and equitably with 'racial' diversity now and in our future. Nowhere is this more apparent and more problematic than in the ways in which 'Whiteness' constructs and constricts the identities that young Australian children are building now for themselves and for others. Australian research that highlights the impact of 'Whiteness' on young children's identity construction will be used to explore the implications of 'White' Australia's past for living and growing democracy now and in the future in and through early childhood education.

## Introduction

Our future is inextricably linked with our past. In post-colonial countries such as Australia our colonial history has produced 'racial' knowledge, desires, experiences and ideologies (an equity terrain) that constantly touch and tear at the possibilities of 'white' Australia living respectfully and equitably with 'racial' diversity now and in our future. We have seen our struggles with 'racial' diversity exposed and explored on the international stage in recent years through events such as the rise of 'Hansonism', our approach to the detention of asylum seekers and our inability at the highest political level to say 'sorry' to Indigenous Australia.

Of Hansonism the Sydney Morning Herald reported on 14th November, 1996:

> **Hanson blamed for rising violence**
> *The Sydney Morning Herald 14th of November 1996*
> Attacks on Asian Australians had more than doubled since the Independent MP Ms Pauline Hanson made her maiden speech in Federal Parliament, a new survey has revealed. Verbal, physical and written abuse against Chinese Australians had more than doubled, while the number of times that Chinese Australians had been spat upon had more than trebled since the controversial speech, in which Ms Hanson opposed Asian immigration and said Australia was being "swamped" by Asians.

We have faced damning reports from the UN Human Rights Commission on our approach to human rights in relation to the poor state of indigenous health and migrants' two-year wait for social security benefits leading to UN Human Rights Commissioner, Ms Mary Robinson calling our approach to human rights 'tragic' (http://www.smh.com.au/news/0008/30/pageone/pageone1.html).

Hansonism, our inhumane treatment of detention seekers, and the lack of a national apology to Indigenous Australians from white Australians are deeply troubling for those of us in Australia who are committed to a present and a future that distances us from our racist past, and its re-emergence now. In my view, our capacity to re-build in the present and for our future is strongly reliant on how we 'racially' educate our youngest Australians now. It is reliant on how they as young Australians learn to construct and

reconstruct the place of 'whiteness' in their present for their future and on how we live 'whiteness' with them. As Gandhi said:

> If we are to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with the children.

## The Persona Doll research

Today I will share what I have learnt about building democratic and racially just early childhood communities from 'beginning with the children' in a research project called the PESD. The aim of the PESD is to investigate and theorise the relationships between preschool children's understanding of social diversity and equity issues and their own gender, class and racial identity, directed by the following questions:

- What relationships exist between preschool children's understandings of cultural and 'racial' diversity and their own gender, class and ethnic identities?
- How can these relationships best be theorised?

*Methods, techniques or modes of inquiry*

The empirical data was (and continues to be) gathered in a qualitative field-based research study using semi-structured individual and group interviews of the participants and observations of their classroom play. These interviews between the researchers and 111 preschool children attending early childhood programs explored how these children thought about and talked about cultural diversity and 'race' using "Anti-Bias Persona Dolls".

The PESD "Anti-Bias Persona Dolls" were specially designed to present social diversity and equity issues to children in two ways. First, they vary in physical characteristics such as skin tone, hair texture and colour and so can physically represent diverse gender and race characteristics. Second, each doll has its own 'persona': a life history that details its 'race', ethnicity, family culture, gender, special interests in stories about the doll. The dolls acted as an icebreaker for initial interviews with children about cultural and racial diversity and offered a focus for three individual interviews with children and for story discussion interviews with groups of children about class, 'race' and gender.

*Data sources and analysis*

Transcriptions of speech from two data sets from the initial 120 child interviews will provide the main source of data for this paper.

- Data set 1 (N= 77) — Anglo-Australian children;
- Data Set 2 (N = 18) — children of immigrants to Australia from the Asia Pacific region.

In overview, children were asked in the initial interviews how they understood the differences and similarities between these dolls, which doll looked most like they did,

which doll that they liked most and which doll they would like to come to their birthday party. They were also asked if they knew people that looked like the dolls, how they knew and what they knew about them. The children were also invited to ask the researchers questions about the dolls.

In analysing these conversations, I have been searching for ways of listening to children and honouring racial justice and equity in how I answer them. I have been increasingly drawn to postcolonial writers who talk powerfully about the links between our pasts, our presents and the possibilities for a 'racially' just society.

Post-colonial theorists challenge us to see and to hear the after-effects of colonisation on how we build our 'racial' identities, desires, knowledge, practices and policies and to use what we see to struggle for greater 'racial' justice and equity in our communities. As I learn to read my conversations with children through post-colonial theories I have seen recurring themes in how the preschool children I talked with in the PESD are constructing their 'racial' knowledge, desires, experiences and ideologies. In particular, I have been confronted by what (Crowley, 1997, p. 106) talks of as the 'extraordinary, ordinariness of whiteness' that has been accomplished in their lives and been challenged to think about its place in my own. More specifically, I have been challenged to think about the implications for me as an early childhood researcher and educator of the shared traces in how 'whiteness' touched my early years and how it now touches the lives of the children in the PESD. I would like to share these challenges with you as a way of inviting you to reflect on the place of 'whiteness', racial justice and colonisation in your lives as early childhood educators, researchers, policy makers and/or practitioners living here in New Zealand.

## The extraordinary, ordinariness of 'whiteness'

Many things helped to produce the 'extraordinary, ordinariness' of 'whiteness' in the early years of my life. I grew up in 1950's Australia. Like me, my family, my neighbours, my teachers, my local shop-keepers and my friends were all white, Anglo-Australians. My storybooks accomplished the extraordinary, ordinariness of 'whiteness' as much through how they portrayed the 'other' to whiteness—non-whiteness as—as through how 'whiteness' was lived by those within them. The 'non-whites' were the exotic and strange 'red Indians' and the silly and scary 'black' golliwogs. All that was magical and good in those early years—Father Xmas, God, the tooth fairy, the Easter Rabbit, and my storybook princesses—were white. I knew without knowing that being 'white' was good, desirable and normal.

What does all that matter know? I was young and I was innocent of Australia's racist past and present. I was innocent of 'white' Australia's history of genocide against its Indigenous peoples and its constant pursuit and enactment of a 'White Australia' policy. I did not know about the history of colonalisation that had led to the fact of 'whiteness' and it ordinariness in my life. But, as Loomba a postcolonial theorist (1988) reminds us, "Knowledge is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power" (p. 43). In other words, our knowledge—even the knowledge of the young—is not accidental and it is not free from relationships with the knowledge of others. Nor, is it untouched by the power-knowledge relationships of a particular time.

My knowledge of 'whiteness' was shaped and reshaped by the social and cultural landscape of 'white' Australian in which 'whiteness' was what I knew, desired, experienced, practiced, believed in and was. My schooling did little to challenge the extraordinary ordinariness of 'whiteness' in my early life and much to reinforce it. British textbooks, British history, British folk dancing and British poetry were only a few of the very British and within this 'white and Anglocized' ways of thinking, knowing and being that were part of my daily life at school. The 'White' Australia policy was still a reality and the impact of post-war immigration policies on Australia's cultural and social landscape was minimal. Its educational and social institutions were not innocent in their articulation and production of knowledge. They were profoundly connected with the operation of 'white' power within Australian society.

Since that time, much has changed. Australia is now one of the most racially and culturally diverse countries in the world with immigrants from over 150 counties (http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/02key-1.htm) arriving in the late 1990s. But, it is the traces of the then-in-the-now of what was said, known and felt by children in PESD that I want to give witness to today. I do this as a backdrop to exploring how 'whiteness' might, could and should be positioned in our approach to early childhood policy, training, research, and pedagogies if we are to avoid going back to future in how we live 'race' relations in Australia. And, how we produce those relationships more broadly in the Asia-Pacific region. How the effects of 'white' Australia on her children parallel the effects of 'white' New Zealand on her children I do not know. But, I hope the research I share today will provoke you to ask what what you do and don't know about how 'whiteness' is constructing New Zealand in the now.

The four traces of my 1950s 'then-in-the-PESD-now' that I will give witness to in this paper are:

- Race-colour matters;
- 'Whiteness' is desirable;
- 'Otherness' is marginal and exotic;
- 'The dark Other' is fearful.

## Race-colour matters

For the majority of Anglo-Australian children we interviewed in the PESD skin colour mattered. Specifically, a majority of Anglo-Australian children (62% — n=42) gave predominance to sorting the dolls by skin color and other physical attributes rather than by equally obvious differences produced by gender or clothing. Spivak (1990, p. 62) calls this process of basing decisions on skin color 'chromatism'.

The terms 'black/brown and white' were introduced and used by the children, not by us as the researchers. For instance:

*Researcher:* At your house. Oh I see. All right so, which doll here looks do you think looks the most like you? The most like you, Sally.
*Child:* This one.
*Researcher:* This one. You chose Olivia.
*Child:* Cause this one's got brown skin.

*Researcher:* Oh. And what colour is your skin?
*Child:* White.

*Researcher:* If you have a look at your skin, which doll has skin like yours?
*Child:* I have white skin, it's that one (pointing to Olivia).

Whilst some children struggled to find the words to accurately describe the color of the dolls many were clear that they themselves were 'white'. They used this term to identify themselves in relation to the dolls and in particular to describe how they were different from Willie and from Shiree. A significant number of the Anglo-Australian cohort of children (17% — n=42) introduced and used the term 'white' to describe themselves and others.

Moreover, for a small group of children being 'white' and being Australian were inseparable. Those children's clarity that 'whiteness' constituted being Australian was most powerfully exemplified by James:

**James**

*Researcher:* These dolls all live in Australia. I was wondering do you live in Australia.
*James:* I was born in Australia.
*Researcher:* Do you think all of these dolls were born in Australia?
*James:* No.
*Researcher:* Can you tell me?
*James:* [INTERRUPTS AND POINTS TO SHIREE] That's Aboriginal isn't she?
*Researcher:* Yes that's right. So, was she born in Australia?
*James:* [SHAKES HIS HEAD.]
*Researcher:* No? Where do you think she was born?
*James:* In Aboriginal.
*Researcher:* In Aboriginal land. And can you tell me about Australia? What it means to live in Australia?
*James:* That you all have white skin.
*Researcher:* So what about Willie? Do you think Willie was born in Australia?
*James:* [SILENCE.]

Additionally, these children said that:

- Willy couldn't be Australian because he was born in Australia but he is still Vietnamese;
- Willy and Shiree are not Australian because "they've got different faces";
- Willy and Shiree must ask God if they want to be Australian. God might allow Shiree to be Australian but not Willy.

Anglo-Australian children also used 'whiteness' as a category when deciding which doll looked most like them and when discussing Shiree. One child's *only comment* during her interview was in response to the question, 'Which doll looks most like you?' Pointing to Olivia she said, 'I'm white'.

Why did skin colour matter to these young children living in multicultural Australia now? Why did some young children prioritise this in their efforts to describe themselves in relation to our dolls? What difference had the past 50 years made in how we as 'white' Australia had come to see and know ourselves? Could knowing your skin colour to be 'white' be an expression of the racial power-knowledge relationships of their time? Or, is their knowledge merely innocent of such colonial power-knowledge relations?

Postcolonial theorists would argue it is not and cannot be. For it is the creation of 'racialised' other that is at the heart of the possibility of racism (Hall, 1996). To racialise the 'other' one must racialise the 'self'. One must know how one differs from the 'other'. For white Australia, skin colour is how one knows oneself. The learning of this begins early but for racism to flourish it is the desire for 'whiteness' and the fear and marginalisation of the 'other'—the 'non-white' that makes skin colour matter. Constructing 'whiteness' matters when desires are constructed in and through it. This takes me to the second trace of the then-in-the-now I want to give witness to today.

## 'Whiteness' is desirable

You may recall that in my early years all things good and lovely were 'white'. I knew I was 'white' and all around me told me that 'white' was good. To know whiteness, as many children in the PESD did, is one thing. To find goodness and beauty in that 'whiteness' is another. My next conversation I call 'Lovely is lighter' and it is taken from my first interview with James a 4 year-old Anglo-Australian child. In this conversation, the link with knowing your 'race-colour' and the desires within this knowledge is undeniable.

**Lovely is lighter**

*Researcher:* Well this is Olivia and this is the last of the dolls you will meet today. Is there anything you can tell me about Olivia?

*James:* She is very pretty.

*Researcher:* What makes her pretty?

*Researcher:* What's that you are pointing at, her dress. Is there anything else that makes her pretty?

*James:* This does.

*Researcher:* What's that, can you use your words to tell me?

*James:* Legs, these are knees.

[JAMES THEN LOOKS AT OLIVIA'S FACE VERY CLOSELY FOR SEVERAL SECONDS. THE RESEARCHER PICKS UP ON THIS CUE AND THEN ASKS A QUESTION.]

*Researcher:* What about her face, is there anything about her face you can tell me?

*James:* Her face is lovely like mine because it's lighter. It's like Tom's.

James was not the only child to find 'white' desirable and good. The majority of the Vietnamese-Australian girls in the study (70 percent) consistently self-identified with the white-skinned and fair-haired doll. Kai was a Thai-Australian girl who also seemed fascinated and enamoured with Olivia to the exclusion of each of the other dolls. She told

us that when asked why she had chosen Olivia as her favourite doll that, 'Olivia is good' and that she didn't want to talk about Shiree or Willie.

How has this come to be for James and for Kai? What is it in the knowledge-power relations of those children's time that produces these possibilities? How have children come to know this? How have they come to express a position that sits so comfortably with Principles Seven and Ten of Pauline's Hanson's One Nation Policy Document on Immigration, Population and Social Cohesion? These principles state that:

> **Pauline Hanson's One Nation Policy Document: Immigration, Population and Social Cohesion**
> **http://www.gwb.com.au/onenation/policy/immig.html**
> Principle Seven: Our migrant intake will be non-discriminatory on condition that the numbers do not significantly alter the ethnic and cultural make up of the country.
> Principle Ten: The Government institutionalised, publicly funded policy of Multiculturalism is not in the best interests of migrants, nor of Australia, and will be abolished.

I am sure that James and Kai had not read this document but what are knowledge-power conditions that produced it and that produced Anglo- and Asian-Australian children's sense of the desirability of 'whiteness' and are the linked? Borrowing from Gilroy (1996, p. 22) can we find 'cues and clues' in their words to explain how desires about 'race' and 'whiteness' merge then and now, in children and in adults? Gilroy argued that:

> Both colonisers and colonised are linked through their histories, histories which are forgotten in the desire to throw of the embarrassing reminders of empire.

How are the embarrassing reminders of empire at work in Hanson's policy documents linked to James and Kai? How is that history precipitating a desire for whiteness now? How does this desire link with the positioning of the 'other'—the 'non-white'—in Australia now. For many children we spoke with the 'other' was regularly positioned as exotic and marginalized. This is the third trace of the 'then-in-the-now' of 'race' that I will now turn to drawing from the words of children's conversations from the PESD.

## 'Otherness' is marginal and exotic

My first remembered encounter with Aboriginal Australians was on a holiday to Gippsland an area in south, eastern Victoria. We visited an Aboriginal reserve to see the 'blackfellas'. I remember the occasion of one that was extremely disturbing. I wasn't sure why we were. But, I do remember feeling the strangeness of their difference to me and I do remember my father's fascination with their odd and exotic cultural artifacts. In these feelings, I was joined with 'white' Australia as I learnt about myself, and about the 'other'. I learnt that 'they' were different to me and that 'they' were 'strange' in their difference.

Central to the creation and maintenance of an ideology of race was (and is) the representation of indigenous cultures as exotic and/or primitive and the colonizers' cultures and worldview as normal and natural.

The majority of Anglo-Australian children in the here and the now that we interviewed expressed traces of these colonial ideas—they saw Aboriginal people through 'their' difference to 'us', and these differences were seen as primitive and/or exotic. For many of these children indigenous Australians were still the strange 'other'. The following extracts show how these understandings were clearly based on inaccurate information:

*Culture as primitive*

*Researcher:* And what sort of things do you know about Aboriginal people?
*Child:* Well, do you know that they can make their own fire, by rubbing two sticks together. Without matches.

. . .

*Researcher:* Alright, anything else about Aboriginal people?
*Yes.* When they get hurt they put a leaf like a Band-Aid or oil. And did you know there were no shops.
*Researcher:* Where were there no shops?
In Aboriginal land Aboriginals made spears and boomerangs. There were no shops or houses. They had to make little huts.

*Culture as exotic and/or strange*

*Researcher:* What can you tell me about Aboriginal people?
*Child:* Um . . . They don't, they only drink water and they don't drink other things that we drink.
*Researcher:* They only drink water you think. They don't drink things that we drink.
*Child:* We drink water, but we drink other things as well.

*Researcher:* Is there anything else you know about Aboriginal people?
*Child:* Um . . . They don't' eat other food that we eat.

*Researcher:* What can you tell me about Aboriginal people?
*Child:* They are bad, they will come and kill you in the night with their knives. They will kill you dead.

No child in the PESD shared any information that suggested that Aboriginal-Australians and Anglo-Australians have anything in common or that there were differences in how Aboriginal-Australians lived their lives. Instead, they had learnt that Aboriginal people were odd and different, and at times, bad. Some children had also learnt that they were to feared.

## 'Otherness' is fearful

The fear of the dark Other is central to colonial racism but it wasn't until my teenage years that I remember knowing how fearful the 'dark' other could be. I had just seen the

Hollywood film starring Sydney Poitier called 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?' At the Sunday lunch table, which in our house was always a place of great chatter and debate across three generations, I declared in protest at something my grandmother said that I would marry an Aboriginal person if I wanted to. If I loved him, and of course, I would, Gran would just have to get used to it. Of course, in my mind, he would look like Sydney Poitier and I would bring him to Sunday lunch. I immediately learnt about the power of my declaration to horrify and shock and to give me some power over the adults in my family.

During my teenage years my grandfather saw 'reds under the bed' and I was regularly warned against them and the 'hoards of yellow peril' that would invade Australia in their millions overnight unless we and Arthur Calwell kept a close watch. Calwell was Australia's first Minister for Immigration in the post-war period and became infamous for his racist retorts such as 'two wongs don't make a white'. A fine choice for a Minister for Immigration!

Much of the discomfort and fear of the 'dark' other I knew in my family I also know in the PESD. Several Anglo-Australian reacted to Shiree's dark skin colour with uncertainty, discomfort and, at times, her active rejection by a small number of Anglo-Australian children (6–14 percent). Most often, this discomfort and rejection was felt through powerful silences. The only silences in Jamie's interview followed questions about Shiree. They were full of discomfort. Whilst Jamie never said 'lighter is lovelier' there is a clear message in her reactions to Shiree.

**Put it back**

*Researcher:* Shall we choose another one? Which one would you like to choose next?
*Jamie:* [SILENCE, THEN POINTS AT SHIREE.]
*Jamie:* That one, would you like to pick her up?
[SILENCE, THEN JAMIE SHAKES HER HEAD, SHIFTING NERVOUSLY.]
*Researcher:* What do you notice about this one?
[SILENCE AND JAMIE AVERTS HER EYES.]
*Jamie:* I don't know.
*Researcher:* I shall tell you that her name is Shiree, and Shiree is an Aboriginal doll. Do you know any Aboriginal people?
[SILENCE, AND JAMIE SHAKES HEAD AGAIN.]
*Researcher:* No. Have you heard about Aboriginal people?
[SILENCE.]
*Researcher:* What do you know about Aboriginal people?
[SILENCE.]
*Jamie:* No. Put it back.

The other five children's responses to questions about Shiree were accompanied by a strong verbal or physical refusal to touch or hold Shiree. Sally expressed this simply and powerfully:

**Sally**

*Researcher:* This one is Shiree. Would you like to hold her?

*Sally:* No yuk.

Sally had wanted to hold each of the other dolls.

The other *five* children's responses to questions about Shiree were accompanied by a strong verbal or physical refusal to touch or hold Shiree and in one instance a refusal to stay in the room if Shiree did.

However, Jamie's final act—she asked Heather to put Shiree back—was accompanied by a powerful expression of disapproval. Was this so for Jamie and the other children that refused to touch, talk about or look at Shiree? It was consistent with research in the USA (*see* Aboud and Doyle, 1995) and Australia (Black-Gutman and Hickson, 1996) showing that white children are often negatively biased against black children.

These young children I am sure have not read what Pauline Hanson wrote in her 'newsletter' titled *'The Truth'* about multiculturalism:

> Abolishing the policy of multiculturalism will save billions of dollars and allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia. (Pauline Hanson, *The Truth,* p. 9).

I am as sure that they have not read what Ron Casey a high profile personality said in 1998:

> . . . the conspiracy exists among prominent politicians to stifle any debate on the immigration issue, and among ethnic leaders in the community to defuse any opposition to unlimited Asian immigration. The facts are plain to see. The majority of Australians are against it, but nothing is done to ensure that their wishes are fulfilled. (Ron Casey cited in Hage, G. (1998). *White Nation,* London: Pluto Press, p. 212)

But it is clear that the terrain of Australian 'racial' politics that touches the lives of adults and children then and the now is disturbingly similar. What does this mean for early childhood education policy, training, research and practice?

## The equity terrain — drawing on the post-modern and postcolonial

Each child enters into a world in which a particular equity terrain has already been accomplished through the operation of power that is gendered, racialised, sexualised and classed. It is the effects of the 'already racially accomplished' on the possibilities that young Australian children are constructing for themselves and others that we need to explore and expose so that we can build possibilities for a different future. The then-in-the-now traces of 'whiteness' from the PESD children remind me that in Australia's present her racist past lives, and therefore our youngest children have already accomplished the preconditions for it to be our future. They know that:

- Race-colour matters;
- 'Whiteness' is desirable;

- 'Otherness' is marginal and exotic;
- The dark 'Other' is fearful.

The events and consequences of September 11 are likely to do little to challenge this knowledge. They may in fact cement it. Much in this possibility should concern those of us committed to building democratic communities that assure human rights for all. Much in this possibility should trouble those of us committed to building democratic early childhood communities that enrich children's rights. If you, like me share these concerns then we must act now to cement a different future for our region by rebuilding the equity terrain of young children's lives.

I use the equity terrain as a metaphor to capture the specific ways in which ideas and practices about equity and social diversity come together at a specific point in time to produce how we understand, practice and shape relationships with each other. The equity terrain is built by how the past inures itself into the present. It does this through a complex meeting of our histories, knowledges, desires, experiences, practices, and positions.

I see the equity terrain as a useful metaphor to call attention to the operation of power and it effects in our lives. As Foucault reminds us, power is everywhere because its effects are through all of us. The operation of power and its effects on our equity knowledges, desires, experiences, practices and ideologies produce particular knowledge-power regimes in which some ideas about how we can and should relate to each other in our diversity and similarities become privileged and others become marginalised, silenced and/or hidden. For instance, 'white' Australia's exercise of the power of 'whiteness' operates like a weather system shaping and reshaping 'racial' knowledge, desire, experience, practice in our specific equity terrain. For Australian children 'whiteness' and the accomplishment of its 'extraordinary, ordinariness' rumbles dangerously and continuously in the foundations of our equity terrain as we live and practice the power of 'whiteness' in our early childhood research, policies, training and practices.

Nowhere has this power been more saddening than in the conversations I have had with young Anglo-Australian children in the late 1990s about who they think they look like, what they think Aboriginal means and about what they know about being Australian. I have been haunted in these conversations by the racist foundations of the equity terrain of my youth. I have seen the traces of my equity terrain in the foundations of theirs. In 2001:

- For some Anglo-Australian children their first and only meeting with Indigenous Australians is when they go holiday and build a picture of them that is about;
- For some Anglo-Australian children their images of being Black and desirable still arise in the popular culture that comes to us from the USA—Michael Jordon rather than Sydney Poitier;
- Colour and relationships between black and white are rarely spoken of and to see a lot of black people around you is still odd (kindergarten). . . . ;
- For some Anglo-Australian children the knowledge that British and Australia are linked through skin colour and really Australians are white;
- Asians are yellow and to be Australian you have to have white skin.

How can this be? Why don't all Anglo-Australian children in early childhood programs know the obvious facts of our life now in:

- that Australia no longer has a White Australia policy?
- that we are a multicultural nation?
- that Black people live in Australia?
- that Indigenous Australians are their neighbours?

What is it in our equity terrain that has made so little change possible? How has early childhood research, training, policy and practice been implicated in creating an equity terrain that makes it possible to continually return to the past as we build our future?

As I search for answers to these questions, I find myself asking:

- is it because much of what we have known about race and young children for the past 50 years has been understood via primarily Piagetian inspired theories that see categorisation and chromatism as normal developmental phenomena rather than as politically learnt one?
- is it because our desires as policy makers, trainers, researchers and practitioners for constructing a racially-just Australia have not been strong enough?
- is it because of our own equity positions in Australian early childhood policy, research, practice and training have been primarily those of the female, white middle class Anglo Australian - how might it have been different, how might it be different if our profession was dominated by indigenous women and immigrant women of colour and if their stories shaped our knowledge of young children?

I am glimpsing the answers to these questions as I listen to the PESD children and search for racially just ways to answer them. I have also found more questions that challenge me to take a fresh position on how 'racial' justice can and should touch my work in early childhood education.

I am asking of myself and my own equity terrain questions such as:

- What power relations have already been accomplished and thus have shaped my equity terrain in the early childhood academy?
- How do these power relations touch children and their understandings about themselves and others and how I am implicated in these?
- What history, knowledge, desires, experiences, practices, ideologies and equity positions have gathered in my local terrain in the early childhood academy to work for and against equitable relationships in our early childhood communities?
- Where are the dangers and possibilities for equitable relationships and understandings with children in my equity terrain as an early childhood academic?
- How does power circulate through my academic practices and desires and what effects its it having on the possibility for social justice in the early childhood community?
- How can I exercise power as an academic to create a sustainable micro-climate of change for greater equity and racial justice in and through early childhood education?

I cannot claim to have found answers to these questions. However, through these questions, I have gained a determination to resist my past in how I construct my future work as an early childhood researcher and trainer and I have confronted the 'racial' choices I make in my work as an early childhood academic.

## Taking a position in the equity terrain

As a 'white' researcher, I can position myself in Australia's racial equity terrain and the knowledge-power regimes produced within it in different ways. I can do research that aims to defend and to document what has been formed in early childhood education through our policies, training, and practices. Or, I can choose to explore what has been silenced or hidden and in doing this become an inventor of what might become and what could be different. In your own work as policy makers, researchers, trainers, and practitioners, you have similar choices. You can defend and document what is, or explore what you have silenced and marginalised in order to invent a different future. The choices are mine and they are yours.

As we live with the after-effects of colonisation and of September 11 I believe that it is critical to building democratic communities with young children that we revisit our choices. Our children and our democracies urgently need researchers, policy makers, practitioners and trainers who not only begin with the children but who do so to answer them in racially just ways. To do this I believe we must ask of what we hear from children:

- What power relations have already been accomplished and how do these touch children and their understandings about themselves and others?
- What history, knowledge, desires, experiences, practices, ideologies and equity positions have gathered in children's local terrain to work for and against equitable relationships in our early childhood communities?
- Where are the dangers and possibilities for racially just and equitable relationships and understandings with children?
- How is racialised power circulating through us and our practices and desires and what effects its it having on the possibility for social justice in our early childhood communities?
- How can we as early childhood professionals exercise power to create a sustainable micro -climate of change for greater equity?

How can we use our positions as researchers, trainers, policy-makers and practitioners to exercise power to create sustainable, equitable and racially just futures? What will happen if we don't or won't commit to answering these questions? What will happen if we don't or won't commit to acting on them with and for children?

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# ADDRESS GIVEN BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

**Hon. Trevor Mallard**

# WELCOME

## Minister of Education

I am delighted to welcome you, Trevor, as our Minister of Education to this NZCER early childhood conference. We have talked today of the value of early childhood education and what it is that can make a difference to children's learning and well-being. We appreciate that you have always acknowledged the vitally important role that quality early childhood education plays. We were heartened when on your appointment as Minister of Education you chose to hold the Early Childhood portfolio and then ensured that the Government acted quickly on key policy issues.

Many of us here have contributed to the development of the early childhood long-term strategic plan. We cherished the opportunity to think deeply about the framework required to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood for all children. If adopted in this entirety, this plan would put the early childhood sector on a sound footing as well as provide a clear indication of priorities for ongoing research.

NZCER welcomes this initiative and looks forward to contributing both to the ongoing research agenda as well as continuing to contribute to policy development. NZCER is very well placed to do this as our Act gives the following mandate:

> The statutory functions of NZCER are to:
>
> - Foster the study of, and research into, educational and other like matters, and to
> - Prepare and publish such reports on these matters as may in its opinion be necessary or of value to teachers or other persons, and
> - Furnish information, advice, and assistance to persons and organisations concerned with education or similar matters. (s,13)

Our current activity in the early childhood sector clearly reflects the intent of the Act with the work of Linda Mitchell and Cathy Wylie—in the areas of quality research, evidence-based policy advice, and publications (the latter, of course also involving many of you in the sector as evident in the *Early Childhood Folio*). Key to achieving the intent of our Act is, of course, knowing deeply about what is going on in Early Childhood Education and this requires not only considerable expertise but the ability to listen. A strength of yours Trevor is commitment to listen to the voices of the sector.

This is deeply appreciated—and now it is our turn to listen to you.

Robyn Baker
Director
NZCER

# SPEECH NOTES

Thanks for inviting me to speak to you.

This audience will be well aware of my commitment to early childhood education—and how this Government's sees it as a key building block for our education system.

Emerging research—such as the landmark Competent Children study which I am launching today—continues to reinforce the benefits of early childhood education.

*Competent Children at 10* shows that early childhood education still counts. Five years after they have started school the early childhood education experiences of the children in the study are still impacting on their performance.

I believe that these are exciting times for early childhood education.

Today, I want to talk about some of the initiatives underway within the sector, focusing on issues like participation, qualifications, and the vital question of quality.

But first, I'd like to outline my vision for early childhood education.

Spelling out the vision can point us towards the tools we need to build it.

My vision is that every New Zealand child gets the chance to enjoy quality early childhood education.

I want a sector diverse enough to meet the needs of children and their families.

I want a sector where all the various services offer a quality early childhood education.

I want a sector where all teachers are well qualified.

I also want to make sure that those children that are currently missing out get a chance to participate in a quality early childhood education service.

So how are we going to get there?

Last year I established a working group to develop a strategic plan for Early Childhood Education.

I asked the members to give me a framework—or a road map—for policy development in early childhood education over the coming decade.

As many of you know, Dr Anne Meade chaired this working group.

A number of early childhood education researchers were also members of this group (Anne Smith, Helen May, Jean Rockell, and Linda Mitchell).

Later in the process it became apparent that a smaller group was needed to do the technical sequencing and staging work.

Last week the technical planning group gave me its report.

I've read it but am still working my way through the implications so I'm not going to respond specifically to it today. I will release it next week.

What I will talk about is some of the exciting work already underway within the ECE sector.

The first of these involves lifting participation—an issue that is crucial to reducing the disparities within our education system.

Since becoming Minister, one of my personal aims has been to boost participation rates in early childhood education.

We know that quality education experiences among our young children build strong foundations for later educational and social success.

We also know that Maori and Pacific families have lower early childhood education participation rates than others do. The *Competent Children at 10* research shows that participation in an early childhood education service that provides a variety of activities across different learning areas and a 'print-rich' environment, as well as quality teachers, has been shown to be important in children's performance at 10.

It is important that low income children also access these services. Equity funding will help with this. As we move towards increasing the numbers of qualified teachers across the early childhood education sector we are going to have to pay particular attention to making sure that we get qualified teachers into early childhood education services that are serving low income communities.

To help turn participation rates around, I have already put in place the Promoting Early Childhood Education Participation project.

This is currently underway in the Auckland, Waikato, Wellington and Canterbury regions—areas with greatest numbers of non participants.

Under this new project organisations are working closely with targeted local communities, to help them to develop 'grass-roots' solutions to barriers to early childhood education participation.

Feedback to date from the Promoting Participation project is underlining the importance of access to quality services.

Over the next few years I am keen to see government take a much more active role in helping communities gain access to the kinds of early childhood education services that meet their specific needs.

This might even see government directly providing buildings in some communities. I've already required that new school sites being purchased are big enough to house an early childhood centre.

The Promoting Participation project is also telling us that the lack of quality early childhood education services can be a barrier to participation.

Parents are saying they'll keep their kids away from early childhood education services if they don't think the services are up to scratch.

Parents have my wholehearted support here—and research would support their decision. Again, the *Competent Children at 10* research shows that the quality of interactions between teachers and children in the early childhood education setting is a key factor accounting for differences in children's performance at age 10. This means that children who went to early childhood education services where the staff were responsive, asked open-ended questions, joined children's play, allowed children to complete activities, and guided children in centre activities are performing better at age 10.

I want to turn now to the vital issue of improving the qualifications of teachers.

Government has made a number of decisions in this regard.

We have seen a bookshelf of research about what makes for quality early childhood education services.

Where professional teachers rather than parents are providing an early childhood education service, the qualification of the teacher is a factor right up there with ratios and group size.

I have therefore started programmes to improve the qualification level of teachers in the sector.

Our first step was to require those designated as 'persons responsible' in centres and co-ordinators in home-based care networks to hold a qualification recognised by the Teachers Registration Board by 1 January 2005 at the latest. New persons responsible must hold the qualification by 1 January next year.

To help people make this adjustment, we have put in place incentive grants to help services meet some of the costs incurred as staff upgrade their qualifications.

We have also set up contracts to deliver Recognition of Prior Learning Assessment and Flexible Programmes for people wanting to upgrade to the Diploma for Teaching (ECE).

This is only the start.

Over the coming decade, I want to see more and more teachers holding qualifications that would be recognised for the purposes of teacher registration.

I know that this is going to be a challenge in some parts of the sector.

We are going to have to plan for it carefully.

We are going to have to provide incentives and support programmes to get people to work towards these qualifications. For early childhood education teachers to achieve quality interactions they need quality teacher education. The results of *Competent Children at 10* are highlighting the importance of quality teacher education and ongoing professional development.

Improving the qualifications of early childhood education teachers does not represent a silver bullet that will solve all of our problems.

Even with qualified teachers and good ratios early childhood education services can still improve the quality of the teaching and learning that takes place.

But I would also like to see the development of programmes and initiatives to improve the way that early childhood education services work with Te Whāriki.

We also need to look at how we can recognise and support quality in early childhood education services where parents—not teachers—are responsible for the education of the children.

The Competent Children research is telling us that these services can achieve quality for children and their families.

These services are important in the diversity of the New Zealand early childhood education sector and they make it distinctive internationally.

We should protect and foster that.

As I said at the start, the goal of the Government is to ensure that no New Zealand child misses out on quality early childhood education services.

The strategic plan will help take us forward in this direction.

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION—A CHILD'S RIGHT?

**Rosslyn Noonan**
*Chief Commissioner*
*Human Rights Commission*

## Greetings

It is a privilege to have been invited to participate with the early childhood sector in this conference launching the findings from *Competent Children at 10*. And I am delighted to recognise so many familiar faces and friends in the hall.

Listening to Cathy Wylie and Wally Penetito this morning reminded me that being a New Zealander is indeed to be something quite distinct, here at the beginning of the world. Over the last four and a half years I have participated in many educational debates and discussions around the world and this morning I heard early childhood issues raised and reviewed with a depth and a passion that I have not encountered anywhere else.

The people in early childhood education and care in New Zealand have achieved an enormous amount over the last 25 years and although there is much still to be done, there is already much to be proud of.

I want to take this opportunity to salute all of you and to acknowledge the early childhood women who have taught me much and inspired me over those years—Geraldine McDonald, Marie Bell, Beverley Morris, Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, Wendy Lee, and Linda Mitchell, to mention just a few who have made extraordinary contributions.

I also want to acknowledge the tremendous contribution that Wally Penetito, Mason Durie, Linda and Graham Smith have made to my understanding of the world and their generosity in opening the door to the Maori world and introducing new ways of seeing.

## Introduction

The violence of 11 September and subsequent developments have made absolutely clear the fragility of so much we take for granted.

Human rights have moved to the centre of the international agenda over the past five years, in response to the increasing conflict between peoples within national boundaries and in recognition of the fact that political and civil, and, equally importantly, social and economic rights are vital to shaping globalisation so that it serves the interests of the poor and most marginalized and not only those of the privileged and powerful.

By fundamental human rights I mean the key international instruments, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Economic Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Conventions on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the eight fundamental ILO labour standards. The rights set out in these Conventions are increasingly acknowledged as the essential underpinnings of peace, justice, stability and environmentally and economically sustainable development.

In the course of our short history as a nation, New Zealanders generally have tended to the practical and pragmatic, wary of taking what might be perceived as a legalistic or litigious approach, and understandably reluctant to allow judges to make final decisions for us. As a result we have not, until recently, paid much attention to international human rights standards—and perhaps we have not felt the need to. We have ratified most, but not all, of the key international human rights standards but we have been slower to fully incorporate them in our public policy and practices.

And most of us are not even aware of the very substantial role that New Zealand played in the development of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which emerged after the dark years of the second world war.

New Zealand made a very significant contribution to the development of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document which provides a remarkably comprehensive and accessible statement of human rights and from which have flowed the key international human rights standards. At the UN Paris Assembly in 1948, where the Declaration was being finalised, the New Zealand delegation emphasised the importance of social, economic and cultural rights:

> My delegation . . . attaches equal importance to all the articles . . . At the same time we regard with particular satisfaction the place which is given in the declaration to social and economic rights. Experience in New Zealand has taught us that the assertion of the right of personal freedom is incomplete unless it is related to the social and economic rights of the common man. There can be no difference of opinion as to the tyranny of privation and want. There is no dictator more terrible than hunger. And we have found in New Zealand that only with social security in its widest sense can the individual reach his full stature. Therefore it can be understood why we emphasise the right to work, the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood and old age. Also the fact that the common man is a social being requires that he should have the right to education, the right to rest and leisure, and the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community.
>
> These social and economic rights can give the individual the normal conditions of life which make for the larger freedom. And in New Zealand we accept that it is the function of government to promote their realisation.

The New Zealand statement can be contrasted with the statement made to the Assembly by Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, the United States representative:

> my Government has made it clear in the course of the development of the declaration that it does not consider that the economic and social and cultural rights stated in the declaration imply an obligation on governments to assure the enjoyment of these rights by direct governmental action.

For the last four and a half years, prior to taking up the position of Chief Human Rights Commissioner, I was employed as Co-ordinator for Trade Union and Human Rights for Education International, the global union organisation representing some 24 million teachers, other education sector workers and their unions. My responsibilities included working with education unions in crisis, for example where governments were particularly repressive, or where conflict, economic difficulties or natural disasters threatened the provision of education.

In March and April this year I made my last visits to Ethiopia, the two Congos, the Central African Republic, Kosovo and Montenegro. I also talked at length with people I'd been working with in Sierra Leone and Serbia. In each place the teachers and union leaders I worked with were shocked that I should consider returning to New Zealand

which they assured me, could not possibly have any human rights issues worthy of my attention.

Are they right? Have I simply come home to take up a sinecure and enjoy an easy life?

Do New Zealanders really need a Human Rights Commission? Do the international human rights standards have any real value for New Zealand?

There is so much I would like to discuss with you, but you have already had a very intense day. So I will conclude by focusing on the relevance of human rights standards to early childhood education and care.

## Relevance of human rights standards to early childhood education and care

Public policy development in New Zealand since World War 2 could be said to have been divided into two phases: a welfare phase and a market phase. With the statement of the Associate Minister of Justice on the introduction of the Human Rights Amendment Bill that the government is committed to mainstreaming human rights considerations into all policy development and implementation, New Zealand now could be said to be moving to a 'rights-based' approach.

A rights-based approach provides a framework for policy development, implementation and evaluation underpinned by the 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family . . .' (to use the words of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.)

The International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (ICSECR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) "recognise the right of everyone to education". [Article 13 (1), ICSECR]. Both go on to spell out what that means specifically in terms of primary education – it "shall be compulsory and free"; secondary education, technical and vocational education and higher education. There is no specific reference to early childhood education.

Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the education of the child shall be directed to, amongst other things, 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'.

In the New Zealand context the results of the Competent Children longitudinal study and other research confirms the very significant impact of quality early childhood education on a child's achievements at primary school. On that basis early childhood education can be viewed as an implicit element of the right to free primary education provided for in the international Conventions that New Zealand has ratified. And not to ensure universal access could, arguably, amount to discrimination or at least indirect discrimination, against those children who miss out.

At least nine Articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are directly relevant to the provision of early childhood services in New Zealand. They are:

- Art. 2 – no discrimination;
- Art. 3 – best interest of the child;
- Art. 6 – survival and development;
- Art. 12 – voice and respect;
- Art. 23 – access and integration for children with disability;

- Art. 28 – access to education;
- Art. 29 – purpose of education;
- Art. 30 – indigenous rights to language and culture;
- Art. 31 – the right to play and recreation

I want to highlight three of those as of particular priority at this time in New Zealand.

The first is the right to education of children with disabilities. Today the Human Rights Commission receives virtually no complaints about discrimination in education on the grounds of sex, but it does receive a number of inquiries about discrimination against children with disabilities.

Indeed I was struck by the number and quality of the submissions received early this year from people with disabilities on the Review of the Human Rights institutions and framework. Barriers to the full development and participation of people with disabilities remain widespread and, for a society with New Zealand's resources, frankly shameful.

Just this month the Complaints Review Tribunal, in a case taken by the Human Rights Commission, issued a decision of great significance for early childhood centres as well as schools and other educational institutions. The case concerned an early childhood centre that declined to allow a child with special needs to attend except when a teacher aide was present and required the child to be picked up by 4 p.m., that is earlier than the other children. The Specialist Education Services provided funding only for a support worker for only part of the time that the mother wanted the child to attend at the centre.

There are a number of aspects of this case which I do not have time to canvas with you today, but I will quote the key aspect of the decision:

> We accept that there were difficulties for the defendant if the child was to stay past 4 p.m. but those were difficulties for her to resolve by means other than restricting the benefits and services she offered to the child by reason of his disability. [Proceedings Commissioner v. H.Kissell, CRT, 17 October 2001]

The second UNCROC Article that I want to highlight covers the right of a child to "enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language." [Art.30]

After living and working in Belgium for four and a half years where there are three official languages and children learn the two that are not their mother tongue, beginning early in their primary schooling, I find the opposition to making New Zealand's two official languages, Maori as well as English, integral parts of the school curriculum, baffling. It is not just a question of ensuring that New Zealand meets the international obligations to which is has voluntarily signed up. Nor is it only a matter of ensuring that the world does not lose forever yet another unique language. Growing up fluent in two very different languages would be an immense asset for every New Zealander. It would extend our understanding of the world and increase our ability to relate to peoples and cultures very different from our own. It would overcome the restrictive monolingualism that is such a hindrance to learning other languages.

The third and last right that I will highlight today relates to the purpose or content of education. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides, among other things, that the education of the child shall be directed to:

> [c] The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own . . .

My fellow Commissioner, Race Relations Conciliator Gregory Fortuin, has said that no child is born racist. The early childhood sector in New Zealand has a crucial role to play in ensuring that our children grow up celebrating diversity, respecting difference, and with the confidence to feel at ease with 'others' rather than to fear them.

I hope these three examples are sufficient to illustrate the extent to which the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide a robust and challenging framework to guide us here in New Zealand in the development of what we should aim to make the very best early childhood services in the world.

## Engage, organise, campaign

In my capacity as Chief Human Rights Commissioner it was very reassuring to see the extent to which those rights were considered in the *Consultation Document for the Development of the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education*. And it was very exciting to hear from the Minister of Education today that the government is adopting a strategic plan and is beginning its implementation. The Minister is absolutely right that the detail and sequencing of the strategic plan is crucial. But nor must we ever lose sight of the ultimate vision.

Clearly there is a shared vision that every child in New Zealand should be able to access quality and appropriate early childhood services. To achieve that requires universal and fully funded services. The international evidence is unequivocal. Children from the poorest and most marginalised communities are not well served when their families have to overcome a series of administrative barriers to quality for individual funding support in order to access provision. It is interesting that a highly targeted service like the Head Start services in the United States covers only about 36% of those eligible.

Another important element of the shared vision is the commitment to supporting families. Early childhood services in some respects are the urbanised communities alternative to the fast disappearing extended family. Early childhood centres can play a crucial role in breaking down the isolation that is a feature of so many young parents.

This conference has rightly focused on the factors within early childhood centres that provide the best possible support for a child's full development and later achievement. However early childhood educators also have an important contribution to make to the development of the best possible environment to bring up children in New Zealand, connecting with others around issues such as housing and paid parental leave.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this address, it has never been more important than it is now to celebrate diversity and build respect for others.

This conference has reminded us all of what can be achieved if we engage, organise and campaign. I look forward to working with you as you translate aspirations into realities for our children and grandchildren.

# THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS

In this section, we present themes and recommendations that emerged from five discussion groups held after participants had heard the keynote addresses by Cathy Wylie, Wally Penetito, Margaret Carr, Glenda MacNaughton and Hon. Trevor Mallard. Note that Rosslyn Noonan's keynote address did not form part of the discussion as she was the final speaker. Discussion groups were asked to consider themes and issues arising from the day and, if they wished, to make recommendations for NZCER to forward to the Minister of Education, Ministry of Education or other organisations where appropriate. It is notable that many of the recommendations mirror those made in the early childhood education long term strategic plan.

Most participants regarded the presentations as interconnected and identified several common themes. These were about:

- constructions of quality;
- language, cultural understanding and practices;
- parent involvement and perspectives;
- a child's right to free early childhood education and the place of children in our society;
- transitions between early childhood services and school;
- teacher training, qualifications, conditions of work and pay;
- early childhood education funding;
- research;
- early childhood education policy development.

## Constructions of quality

All groups commented that the importance of quality education for children's well-being and learning was an evident theme in the conference presentations. Each presentation seemed to contribute to a richer understanding of the issue, 'What is quality?'

One group discussed the challenge of how any concept of quality can take into account local contexts and multiple differing perspectives. The discussion drew on notions that the concept of 'quality' is constructed and not formula driven. There was comment that the concept of 'quality' derives from Western notions of knowledge that may not be generalisable. One participant described how she is working with local whanau and hapu to consider developing viable education plans. The starting point is discussion with parents, families and hapu on what are the needs of babies and children. From this basis, education is seen as continuous and centred in the whanau first. While the importance of qualified staff was not denigrated, the knowledge base of staff, such as their understanding of cultural beliefs may be inappropriate.

This led to consideration of differing forms of 'literacy' and to how research could contribute to helping us develop our understanding of quality. The following ideas were discussed as ways to further the 'quality' debate:

- demonstration of inspirational practices;
- the need to learn as part of a bigger community;
- having opportunity to gain knowledge and experience and to contribute to examination of the question, 'What is early childhood quality?'

Assessment was regarded as a tool to contribute to quality practices. Several groups affirmed the place of parents and children in assessment processes. They reinforced the value of building on assessment through parents' contribution from a home perspective. As well as deepening understanding of the child, this was seen to have a further useful spin-off in strengthening the relationship between home and early childhood service.

A related issue was seen as the importance of 'putting assessment to good purpose', and not simply 'undertaking unnecessary extra work'.

One group affirmed local ways of doing assessment and emphasised the need for provision of resources for visual documentation. Another group noted that learning stories are just one way of doing assessment.

## Language, cultural understanding and practices

Many issues were raised about language, cultural understandings and teaching practices. These included:

- affirmation of the relationship between culture, participation and democracy;
- a perceived fear for some teachers of working with children from other cultures;
- the importance of focusing on tikanga as well as te reo Maori;
- the challenges of becoming a bilingual country;
- that we need funding and policies to support bilingualism;
- the difficulty and cost of finding good multi-cultural resources;
- the need for a languages policy.

Some questions were raised:

- How can teachers be supported to work through racist attitudes?
- What is the role of early childhood education in relation to educating parents?

***Recommendation:***

- Develop and implement a Languages Policy both nationally and in individual centres, drawing on existing work and research evidence.

## Parent involvement and perspectives

The value of involving parents in children's learning and drawing on their knowledge, skills and understanding of their own children came through all discussion groups. One group thought we need to re-conceptualise what we mean by involvement. What do parents want from the relationship? How can early childhood services work with parents in ways that empower parents and children?

An issue discussed by one group was a view that secondary schools could play a greater role in preparing students for parenting.

Another group discussed a view that we need to shift from a 'market democracy' to a 'social democracy' so that parents are supported in their role as parents and valued for their contribution to society.

## Children's right to free early childhood education

Four groups discussed whether a child should be entitled to access free high quality early childhood education and/or the related issue of access to early childhood education. Several issues were discussed.

One view was that a legislated entitlement to free high quality early childhood education would acknowledge the value of early childhood education for children's learning and well-being and for society as a whole. That value was demonstrated in Cathy Wylie's 'competent children' research where enduring effects of early childhood education were still evident in children's competencies at age ten years. Provision of an entitlement to free education would indicate that the government (representing the interests of society as a whole) puts children's interests first and makes their educational interests a high political priority.

Financial barriers to access would be removed for all children. This was seen as important in light of evidence that children from low income families participate less than children from high income families in early childhood education and evidence that cost is a major barrier to participation.

It was pointed put that several OECD countries provide free early childhood education for three and four year olds and some for younger age groupings.

This group recommended that every child should have a statutory right to free education

The second group discussed possible meanings of 'a basic right to participate'. Questions raised by them were:

- Does free education necessarily mean compulsory education? Given that in New Zealand, education is free only in the compulsory schools sector, this issue needs clarification.
- If early childhood education was free, would there be downward pressure from schools to emphasise literacy and numeracy at the expense of other aspects of the early childhood curriculum?
- Is it better to address barriers to participation and support services rather than provide a universal entitlement?
- What is the true picture of participation? The Ministry of Education does not collect information on those participating in more than one service at a time. Since some children are double counted, figures are therefore an overestimate of actual numbers of children participating. It was noted that some schools collect information on participation. While this is too late for those particular children, it could provide information on early childhood services in the area for the child's siblings.

The third group discussed a related theme: the importance of services being available where they are needed. It recommended that state funded provision should be supported where communities have less resources to establish provision.

The fourth group discussed assumptions that parents are discerning about their choice of centre. However, the group thought that location and cost are major factors for parents, not the educational programme.

***Recommendations:***

- That the government legislate for an entitlement for free early childhood education
- That state funded provision should be supported where communities have less resources to establish provision

## Transition to school

A theme of all discussion groups was the value of making links across sectors through discussion of ideas and curriculum practice. In particular, groups supported measures to make smoother transitions between schools and early childhood education services. Some discussion was held on a range of possible approaches including:

- allowing children to stay longer in school;
- using Te Whāriki in years one and two in schools (in low income areas);
- having a common curriculum for ages birth to eight years;
- undertaking common professional development among new entrant, junior school and early childhood teachers;
- bringing children's portfolios and assessments into school;
- having regular planning meetings between schools and early childhood services;
- including early childhood education from the beginning when relevant new schools' policy is being developed, e.g., policy on ICT, curriculum stocktake;
- ensuring officials regard early childhood education as part of a seamless education system, and not as an 'add on'.

The importance of good curriculum resources to support both *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* was emphasised.

***Recommendations:***

- That continuity of curricula be promoted between early childhood education and primary sectors.
- That continuity of language policy be promoted between early childhood education and primary sectors.

## Teacher training, qualifications, pay and working conditions

All groups made reference to the importance of early childhood staff and of their training and working conditions. One group discussed staff needing to have time to write and develop learning stories and to examine their own practices values and assumptions. Three groups emphasised the importance of commitment of leadership and management to understanding the need for training and supporting staff and their professional development. One group discussed the need for financial support to gain teaching and higher qualifications, but also thought that those who had 'lagged' behind are now benefiting. This group suggested that consideration should be given to how equity funding could be used to attract qualified staff. This group also made the point that improvement of practice requires good professional networks, such as is evident in kindergartens. Teachers need to be able to articulate professional knowledge and what is

important in practice. Four areas for recommendations were highlighted: initial teacher education, professional development, conditions of work and rates of pay.

***Recommendations:***

- That the government oversee a planned approach to provision of professional development (individual, whole team) and allocate sufficient government funding for this (two groups);
- That preservice teacher education students have access to services in all sectors and that they are well informed before visiting early childhood services;
- That the government require staff in early childhood services to be trained [and registered] teachers and that this be implemented as soon as possible (two groups);
- That government financial support be available for staff to gain teaching and higher qualifications;
- That pay parity for early childhood teachers be implemented (three groups) and that the government directly pays the costs of teachers' salaries (one group), and that this is fully funded (two groups);
- That there should be no student fees for teacher education;
- That there should be better access to tertiary education;
- That teacher education institutions offer more support for Maori and Pacific Islands students;
- That teacher education programmes should be of high standard and based on research.

## Funding

Some recommendations about funding in relation to special programmes and access of families were proposed by one group in each case. Another group thought that funding for home-based educators is insufficient if there is an expectation that they will implement Te Whāriki.

***Recommendations:***

- That ESOL funding be increased;
- That there should be increased professional development for ESOL education (with funding);
- That an ICT strategy be developed and funded;
- That the WINZ Childcare Subsidy be made available to children up to the age of 6 years (currently this is only available up to the age of 5 years).

## Research

All groups thought that research plays a positive and important role in the early childhood education sector.

***Recommendations for research:***

- Government funding for a new longitudinal study, similar to the Competent Children study to track the impact of policy changes on early childhood education and children's competencies and gain more insight into 'process quality';
- Research and exemplars of 'quality' early childhood services;
- Research to explore the links between management structures, staff qualifications, initial and inservice teacher education;
- A sound research base for policy implementation and closing the gap between new knowledge and implementation;
- Making research available to teachers and encouraging a 'reading' culture amongst teachers.

## Policy

One group commented on the positive changing role of government and its new partnership approach to the sector, which seemed to demonstrate a government commitment to early childhood education.

***Recommendations:***

- That all political parties note the importance of commitment to the early childhood education long-term strategic plan;
- That working groups similar to those held during the 1980s at Lopdell House be re-instituted for early childhood, primary and secondary education;
- That resourcing should follow policy, not determine policy.